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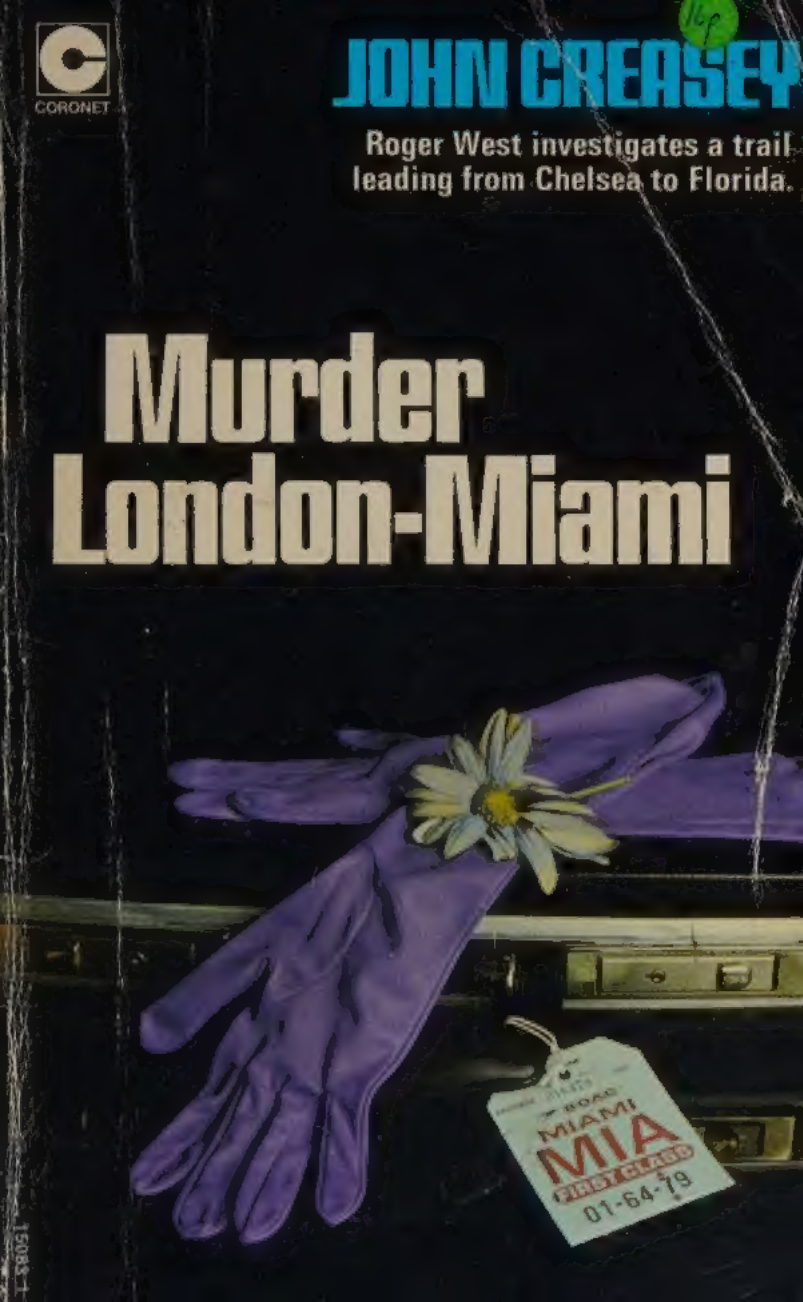
JOHN CREASEY

Roger West investigates a trail leading from Chelsea to Florida.

Murder London-Miami



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MURDER, LONDON–MIAMI

Sir David Marshall was obviously a deeply troubled man—as obviously in love with his secretary, Henrietta. She was almost indispensable and worked for him with absolute dedication. Scotland Yard, through Chief Superintendent Roger West, first became interested in Marshall when he had a bitter quarrel and a fight with one of Henrietta's suitors. Marshall, as West knew, had access to secret State documents and all enquiries about the man had to be made with utmost delicacy. The last thing he expected when he began the investigation—first into an assault, then into murder—was that it would lead him from London to Miami Beach, Florida. In a desperate and stunning climax, West has to keep all his wits about him to untangle this complex and confusing case.

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Murder, London–Miami

John Creasey

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CONTENTS

Chapter		*Page*
1	THE JEALOUS MAN	7
2	THE ANGRY WOMAN	15
3	THE THIRD IN THE TRIO	23
4	THE CLASH	30
5	'CIVILISED' MEN	37
6	ADVICE FROM A POLICEMAN	44
7	WARNING OVER DINNER	52
8	THE PROMISE	57
9	DECISION	64
10	THE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN	71
11	THE MURDER	81
12	CAUSE FOR ANXIETY	89
13	A MASS OF EVIDENCE	98
14	SUSPICION GROWS	105
15	DOUBLE DECEPTION	112
16	COUSIN CHLOE	122
17	THE CONFRONTATION	131
18	THE DOCUMENTS	138
19	THE TELEPHONE CALL	146
20	THE TRUTH	151

1

THE JEALOUS MAN

'IF he comes here again,' David Marshall said, 'I'll kill him.'

He sat strangely still; his face young for his forty years, but his expression that of an ageing, bitter, vengeful man.

It hurt Henrietta to look at him, and her hurt was made worse by the hopeless knowledge that there was no reason in what he said, no reason at all, only an anguish of emotion which she could see but could not understand.

'I mean it,' David said. 'I'll kill him.'

He watched her, expecting her to speak, waiting on her words.

The David whom she had first known—he had been so essentially 'Sir David Marshall' then, remote and almost awesome—would have used his mind to listen to her, would have been wholly reasonable and objective; but over the last few months his objectivity had nearly gone, and, in a chilling way, Henrietta suspected that she was the cause of its going.

She had done something to this man she so respected and admired. She had, without intention and at first without realising, caught and entrapped him, and no matter what she tried to do now she could not set him free.

'All you do is sit there,' he said, piqued by her lack of response. 'Why can't you say something? I've just told you that I'm going to kill your lover.'

She was stirred to protest, not yet to anger.

'You know very well he is not my lover.'

'I know you *say* he's not.'

'I'm not going over that again,' she said wearily. 'I have no lover. I've *never* had a lover.'

She was thirty-one; and she told the truth.

'I don't believe you,' he said flatly. 'You're far too attractive never to have had a lover.'

'David,' she said, ignoring the remark, 'I think you ought to go away for a holiday.'

'I'm sure you do,' he said quickly. 'So that he can come to my house, make love to my secretary——'

'David,' Henrietta interrupted, her tone icy, 'I am beginning to dislike you very much.'

It wasn't true; it was only his moods she disliked. Now she saw that she had hurt more than she had intended, and longed to take back the words.

He sat upright, squaring his shoulders.

'Yes. You do dislike me, don't you?' His voice was brisker. 'Let's have the truth—you love him, don't you?'

'Whether I love him or anybody else is my affair,' Henrietta made herself say. 'If you were in a different mood, you'd be the first to say so.'

'So we're back at that again. You work for me, your private life is no business of mine. You seem to have forgotten how close we've grown to each other—how much of a confidante you've become—how much I rely on you, *need* you.'

She made no comment.

'It's always the same,' he went on. 'One minute you seem to be really fond of me—the next you're like a block of ice. But then how could you be fond of me,' he added bitterly, 'when we both have such different backgrounds? I mustn't forget that, must I? My culture is only acquired; yours is due to breeding.'

'David,' Henrietta said desperately, 'please don't go on like this.'

He pushed his chair back and stood up.

Sometimes, when he did that, it meant the end of the discussion; that he had decided it was safer to be alone, and nurse himself back to a mood that was at least bearable. The pattern of the past year had become very set; in half-an-hour or more, sometimes less, he would come into her room and say something so warmed with humility that she would melt towards him, and they would talk on entirely different lines, he pouring his heart and his confidences out to her, she wanting desperately to help him She would forget, again, that he would misunderstand, that he would want to take her in his arms, yearning to love and be loved.

Until he realised she did not want these things.

What he did not, could not, understand was that she wanted them with no man.

Oh, how silly it was, how crazy it was—and at times how deadly it seemed, and how hopeless.

Did he want her to go back to her room?

If not, then he would walk about the study, trying to argue himself out of the mood, drawing closer to her, until at last he would take her hands in his. He would expect her to yield, to forget the angry things he had said, and to reassure him.

He stepped to the window and stood looking out on to the smooth, velvety lawn, some roses beginning to bud, some beds of antirrhinums not yet in full bloom, and neat paths of yellow gravel. Beyond was a high wall of mellowed brick. This was one of the few genuine Queen Anne properties left in Chelsea, between the quiet river and the bustle of Kings Road The house itself was small; David lived upstairs and worked downstairs, and before these moods had seized him they had usually lunched together in the kitchen, after his daily help had gone.

'You don't believe me, do you?' he asked abruptly.

'What don't I believe?'

'That if Ward comes here again, I'll kill him.'

'Of course I don't believe it.'

Without looking round, yet with a change in tone which told her what change had come in his expression, he said:

'Keep him away. Because I mean it.'

In that moment there was no doubt at all; he meant exactly what he said. The realisation made Henrietta feel a sudden fear, but also anger. What right had David to say such things to her? She spent so many hours here, dedicated to working for him. She liked the work, at times she loved it, but she could not give him every hour of every day. Oh, how absurd it was! If Gerry called for her and she wasn't ready, then she would ask him in. Not to be able to do so would be intolerable. But if she said this now, what would David do? In his present mood, she could not be sure.

But already her anger was fading; already she was anxious only to help him. Time and time again she told herself that she must not let him get away with such accusations, that he would take her compassion—and it *was* compassion—for weakness. She should be stronger, but such was not her kind of strength.

He was watching her now, eyes burning.

'Do you understand?' he asked harshly.

'David,' she said quietly, 'what's upset you so much today?'

'Do you understand?' he asked again.

She hesitated.

. . .

She did not know that, when he was in such a mood as this, she nearly drove him mad. Her stillness, the unwinking gaze of her beautiful blue eyes, her almost

bird-like alertness—all of these things affected him; but she did not know.

. . .

'Yes,' she said. 'I understand perfectly well.'

He drew nearer, until he stood only a few feet away from her, quite motionless. She did not like the way he stared; he *was* different from his usual self, even at his most difficult. He seemed almost a stranger. Yet she had worked for him for rather more than six years and known him—or believed she had known him—for three. In those early aloof days, when she had no reason to suspect that he was anything but happy, loving his wife, he had been a stranger. Although she had respected and at times even liked him, she had never felt that she had known the real man. But for the past three years she had come to believe she was familiar with all his moods, and this different one was almost sinister.

She was deeply troubled.

Usually, it was he who would come towards her. In moments when he seemed to be frozen, incapable of moving or relaxing, he would suddenly wilt, despair would show in his eyes, and he would come to her for comfort and for solace, holding her tightly, fiercely, as if he dared not let her go. And she would coax him into talking, into telling her what had worried him

Only once before had she seen him look as he looked now; that had been the first time, the very first time, he had talked. Then, he had sat behind his big, red-topped desk, she sitting opposite him.

'What is worrying you?' she had ventured to ask at last.

'You don't know, do you?' he had answered.

'No,' she had said.

'I've hidden it from you completely, then?'

'Hidden *what* from me?'

'Henrietta,' he had said, 'my wife is mad.'

It had been a very great shock to her. There had always been something a little different about Yolande, of course, times when she was over-excited, times when she stayed in her room for days on end, seeing no one; but Henrietta had not thought about it deeply, her interest then had been so much more in the work and the man rather than in his private life. She had only an acquaintance with Yolande—his blonde, unbelievably selfish wife. It had never occurred to her that she and Yolande could ever have anything in common, and David's home life was something quite remote from her, even though she worked in his home.

His expression at the time he had told her had been exactly as it was now, and she could remember his words vividly.

'Henrietta—my wife is mad.'

. . .

It was true; literally true, she had learned.

Psychiatrists had tried to help Yolande, but every kind of treatment had failed; and now she was in a private nursing home, a luxury place where she was well cared for, and from whence—if David told the truth and Henrietta had never known him lie -she did not wish to come.

'She's happier there,' he said, occasionally.

Gradually, Henrietta had come to learn how lonely he had been for so many years, hiding the fact of his wife's insanity from the world Gradually, too, certain facts had emerged: that it was because of this that there had been no children; that Yolande had been aware of the mad streak in her, but that he, David, had not known of it until after their marriage.

'And when I did know of it,' he said, 'I came to hate her.'

'David, don't say that. *Please* don't say that.'

'But you and I have a pact,' he had said through his pain. 'We tell the truth to each other. Don't you remember? Am I to lie to you because you don't like a certain aspect of the truth?'

And she had admitted: 'No, of course not.' And added: 'I just wish it weren't true.' Then after a pause, searching her heart and mind to find something to say which would give him courage, she had added again: 'But I can understand it.'

He had laughed, as if genuinely amused.

'You—understand hate? You couldn't hate anyone if you tried all your life.'

'But intellectually I can understand it,' she insisted.

'Ah, yes. Understand but not feel it. I hope to God you never know what hatred feels like, Henrietta.'

Then he had started to talk of the little daily hurts of his years with Yolande, of the effort of hiding the truth about her, of trying to help her, of suffering so much in silence.

Now, he looked exactly as he had looked that day three years ago, when he had told her how he had learned to hate.

. . .

At that moment, at half-past six in the evening of a pleasant day in June, a man turned into Bell Street, Chelsea, not half-a-mile away from Sir David Marshall's home. His was a smaller but self-contained house in a street which was much more suburban than those around it. He had lived there for nearly twenty years.

His wife was weeding the narrow flower-bed round the small lawn as he drove into the garage. She stood up

and went towards him, both deriving obvious pleasure from the familiar meeting.

The man was Superintendent Roger West of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard.

2

THE ANGRY WOMAN

HENRIETTA studied David's features intently and felt what she had come to feel more often than ever in her life: tenderness. She wanted to comfort him, to ease the tension he was feeling, but did not know how best to do it. Recollection of that first moment of confidence, when he had told her that his wife was mad, had clouded her mind; but now it was clear again.

The certain thing was that she could not accept this situation, could not allow him to dictate such terms to her Once she did so, he would dominate her absolutely, and she knew that he had great strength of will. He stood unmoving, unyielding, in front of her, until again she asked:

'David, what *has* upset you? Please tell me.'

'You've upset me,' he answered flatly.

'I certainly didn't mean to.'

'I couldn't have made it plainer that I don't want that man in my house.'

'You know—you're absurd,' Henrietta said with a sudden spurt of anger. She saw the set of his jaw, but went on: 'There isn't the slightest need for you to make all this fuss! I can't keep him, or anyone else, on the doorstep when they call for me.'

'He doesn't have to call for you,' David said.

There was going to be no reasoning with him; the moment had come to recognise that. It hurt, because it was so unfair and unreasonable; but David was David and it was useless to try to force him out of this sort of mood. It passed through her mind that one day she

would have to get another job—but the thought passed; it was practically unthinkable that, while he needed her, she would ever leave him.

'Can't we talk about this again tomorrow?' she asked. 'You really ought to sign those letters.'

'They can wait,' he said.

'But you said——'

'They can wait,' he repeated irritably.

'Don't let's argue any more,' she pleaded, 'I'm so tired.'

'You wouldn't be tired if *he* were coming,' David flashed.

Quite suddenly, reason deserted her and anger surged out of control. Night after night she worked late, Saturdays and Sundays she would work if need be, reading and researching until she felt that her head would split with concentration. Last night was the first for over a week that she had left by half-past six—and even then she had kept Gerry waiting for nearly an hour, kicking his heels and getting more and more annoyed.

'Trying to cope with you in this mood would make anyone tired,' she said sharply. 'I'll go and get the letters.'

She turned on her heel and stalked towards the door which led to her room, an annexe of David's study. She reached the door and pulled it open, hearing no sound—but suddenly David's hands fell on to her shoulders and he spun her round.

'Henrietta –don't ever run out on me'

She felt the pressure of his fingers very tight on her shoulders -and his thumbs and forefingers were very near her neck. His eyes had a glitter which she had never seen in them before She did not move, but spoke with restrained tension.

'David, let me go.'

The pressure at her neck increased. She believed that

he meant it to increase, that he was trying to frighten her; and her anger flared up again.

'Let me go, David!'

'I'll let you go when I have your promise never to allow Gerald Ward in my house again.'

She waited for perhaps ten seconds. Then she pulled herself free and pushed him away, snatched at the door and opened it, and ran through, slamming it behind her. Quite suddenly tears stung her eyes and she went almost blindly to her desk and dropped into her chair.

The door did not open; and she prayed that it would not, at least until she was more in control of herself, when she would be able to talk more calmly.

This small, book-lined room was in itself a place of calm. She had come to regard it as her own. One wall was filled from floor to ceiling with David's reference books; Henrietta, who so loved books and words, had come to regard these as her own, too. Her desk, the same style as his, was smaller, and by its side was a typewriter table, with a stream-lined machine on it.

His letters, placed by the typewriter and ready for signing, caught her eye. Unless she went to the main post office she would miss tonight's post.

She sat staring at them, her vision blurred through tears—she had not realised that she had cried. She felt physically exhausted. David's words echoed and re-echoed through her mind, but one thing slowly emerged as being most immediately important: the letters.

She ought to take them into him.

Yet if she waited, and if he behaved as he normally did, he would soon open the door and stride towards her, put out his hands for her to take, and draw her from her chair. He would hold her tightly, and for a moment she would yield. Then, slowly he would let her go and she would drop back into her chair, with an odd feeling of relief. This would be partly because his tension would

have eased, partly because she never really liked that moment of physical closeness.

She sat for what seemed a very long time.

He wasn't coming, of course; this mood *was* different, more intractable She was over her own anger now, and wondered what *had* happened to upset him so much. The most likely thing was that he had had news of Yolande. She, Henrietta, ought to go and talk to him -or at least give him the chance to talk, and the letters were ample excuse. She put her hand on them—a long hand with large but well-shaped nails, a gold signet ring on the little finger of her right hand, a family ring.

There was still no sign from next door.

She stood up—and the buzzer at the telephone on her desk rang; he was calling her, but at the same time demonstrating his no-nonsense-I'm-the-boss mood. She gave a little smile : it was really so absurd. Why did men so often behave like small boys, standing on their dignity when really they should laugh? She picked up the letters and went straight in to him.

He was sitting at his desk.

'I'll sign those letters,' he said. 'They can still catch the post at the main post office. Can you go home that way?'

'Yes, of course.'

She sat opposite him; he signed, she filled and sealed the envelopes in a curious atmosphere of restraint.

'Are you in a hurry tonight?' he asked, when at last they were finished.

She was over an hour late, her hair-washing, dress-pressing, newspaper-reading plans for the evening were already in jeopardy.

He looked ill, she thought.

'No hurry at all,' she said.

He nodded and sat looking at her; there *must* be something seriously wrong.

'David—please tell me what the matter is.'

'If I told you, you wouldn't believe me.'

'You could try,' she suggested.

'I'll try,' he said. 'I love you.'

She had only half-expected that, and she did not quite understand the effect it had on her: a curious, sharp *ping*! of pain in her breast, followed by a feeling almost of alarm.

'Do you?' she asked, quietly. 'You show it in a strange way.'

'It's the truth,' he said. 'I could kill any man who put his hands on you.'

He had fine, clear grey eyes; and now they seemed to burn. The lines round them and the shadows gave them an added brilliance, and she could not help the flash of thought which came into her mind: that that brilliance could be the glint of madness.

'I wish you wouldn't talk like that.'

'But it's the truth,' he insisted.

'You may feel like it now——'

'*May!*' he exploded. 'I do feel like it, now and every waking minute of the day. Why do you pretend you don't know? Why do you behave as if you haven't an ounce of feeling in you? My God, you can freeze the very blood in me, just by the expression in your eyes.'

Heavily, wearily, she said: 'I don't intend to.'

'No, I'll grant you that,' he said bitterly. 'It's the natural you, when you're with me. I'll bet *he* sees a different you.'

If Gerry Ward even attempted to be as familiar with her in the way that David had come to accept as his right, she would never see him again.

'I think I ought to go home,' she said.

'You said you were in no hurry.'

'I'm not in a hurry,' she confirmed. 'I just don't want to talk like this.'

He pushed his chair back, but did not get up, stared out of the window and then closed his eyes, as if he felt a heavy, wounding pain. She was never sure whether it was affectation when he did that, or whether he was simply trying to win her sympathy. She *felt* sympathy, whatever his intention, and studied his profile.

He was the most handsome man she knew.

He had the best brain of any man she knew, also—and, surprisingly, either he did not realise its range and power, or else was genuinely touched with humility

He spoke without opening his eyes.

'He's no good, you know.'

She didn't answer.

'He's not worth an hour of your time.'

She still didn't answer.

'I can't understand what you see in him,' he insisted, and now he opened his eyes and turned his chair to look at her. He closed his eyes again, momentarily, as if to shut out a vision. Of her? How was it that at certain times they could be so close, while at others they were such poles apart? wondered Henrietta.

'David,' she said. 'I'm not going to talk about Gerald. I've already told you that you've no reason to be jealous of him or of anyone.' He had neither right nor reason, but she did not speak of 'right'. 'There's no one I like and respect and admire more than you,' she added. 'I'm devoted to you. You *must* know that.'

'Yes,' he said. 'It happens not to be enough.'

She took refuge in silence, the only refuge.

'Come and live here with me, Henrietta,' he said at last 'There's no reason why you shouldn't. You've no family ties, you've a poky little flat, you spend an hour and a half a day travelling—and you could have your own suite of rooms here, all the comfort I could give you—everything. Yolande won't ever come back, no one would blame either of us. And you'd be happier than

you've ever been in your life. Happier and more secure and free from all the silly little chores which take up your time. Why won't you? What makes you so stubborn?'

It was not the first time he had suggested this, but he had never been so dispassionate, never subdued his emotion as he was doing now She did not quite know how to answer, even whether to answer; she wished now that she hadn't stayed.

'*I* know why you won't,' he added harshly. 'Your heads filled with romantic notions of young love, white weddings, bridesmaids——'

The telephone bell cut across his words.

He caught his breath, tightened his lips, then motioned to her.

'Say I'm out I don't want to talk to anybody.'

Relieved at the break in the tension, thinking that it might well enable her to change the mood of the talk, Henrietta picked up the receiver.

'Sir David Marshall's home.'

'Are you going to stay there all night?' demanded Gerry Ward in a voice so loud and clear it echoed about the room.

. . .

In the kitchen of his home, Roger West put his arm lightly round his wife's shoulders as she stood at the oven.

'How would you like a holiday this year?' he asked. 'Starting next week?'

Janet West twisted round to see whether he was serious. She looked flushed and untidy and suddenly excited.

'*Next* week? You mean it?'

'Yes, unless something unexpected crops up,' said Roger. 'I thought we'd——'

The telephone bell interrupted him.

'I'll bet that's something unexpected,' Janet said almost bitterly. 'Sometimes I wonder whether we'll ever get away on holiday together again.'

3

THE THIRD IN THE TRIO

IN David Marshall's lovely room there was silence.

The echoes of Gerry's voice over the telephone still sounded. Henrietta stood with the pale grey instrument in her hand, startled. David sat with his jaw set, staring out of the window.

'Are you *there?*' demanded Gerry Ward.

'I'm working late tonight,' Henrietta said, surprised by her own calmness. 'I don't know what time I'll be free.'

'But, Henrietta! I may have to be away for——'

She put the receiver down, briskly, cutting off his voice. Now, the silence seemed absolute.

'You once told me,' said David in a brittle voice, 'that you asked your friends not to telephone you while you were here.'

'I once told you,' said Henrietta, in an exasperated voice, 'that I asked my friends not to telephone me when I should be working.' She glanced at a star-shaped clock, centred on the mantelpiece; it was nearly seven o'clock.

'You knew he was waiting for you, didn't you?'

Henrietta felt, once again, that this was a moment of crisis If she told him what was in fact the truth, that she had not known Gerry was waiting, this might appear to David to be a concession to his right to interfere with her life outside this house. And above everything she prized her independence, rejecting the right of any human being to direct her affairs.

She had suffered much during the only period of her life when she *had* given a man that right; and she knew

that remembrance of this suffering influenced many of her attitudes, most of all her attitude towards any thought of marriage.

'It doesn't really matter whether I did or I didn't,' she said at last. 'I preferred to stay here and talk to you.'

'You mean I made it impossible for you not to stay'

Henrietta bit her lip and turned her head away, a fresh flare of anger almost making her jump up again, and leave But if she did, then there would be an awkward situation to face in the morning, and it could mean a long, uneasy, unhappy day. When she looked back his face seemed to have changed, she saw the pain in his eyes, no less because it was self-induced. Then she wondered yet again what *had* caused his present mood. There must be something he had not yet told her, and if she could only make him talk this might be of great help to him as well as to her.

'David,' she said gently, 'I do wish you'd tell me what's upset you.'

'I keep telling you what's upset me,' he said savagely. '*You* have upset me. I am sick and tired of spending evening after evening here alone while you're off with your newest admirer. Get *that* into your head. It's *you* who's upset me. When are you going to realise that though I can't offer you the legal ceremony of marriage, I *can* offer you everything else, which is a hundred times more than you'd get from these moronic young fools you spend your evenings with. My God, you wouldn't last six months with any one of them—they'd drive you mad with their addle-pated inanities Stop fooling yourself—they're too young for you, they've nothing to offer you but——'

Something cracked in her.

She was already tired, she had been working too hard for too long, and the emotional stresses of the day had taken their toll. Now, her self-control cracked and she

sprang up from her chair and stood by the desk, quivering with rage.

. . .

She would never know how beautiful anger made her, never know what the fire did to her blue eyes, or the quivering tension did to her lips, or the poise did to her figure. In that moment she felt she hated him; all that she wanted to do was *hurt*.

. . .

David Marshall sat, startled out of his bitter, savage mood, seeing Henrietta as he had never seen her before, so filled with anger that she lost the cool, imperturbable calm which so often maddened and at other times hurt him in ways he did not understand. Everything else faded from his mind—his jealousy of Gerald Ward, his own anger, the sense of near-despair that he had felt all day. He placed his hands on the arm of his chair and began to get up, searching in his mind for something to say to console her, but could not find it.

'No wonder Yolande went mad.' Henrietta's voice shook 'And you're mad yourself or you wouldn't behave like this. Well, you needn't worry about Gerald coming here again. He certainly won't, because *I* won't.'

David stared at her, as if stunned by her words. There was no awareness of time in the seconds or minutes which followed. And there was no whisper of sound, until the drone of a car engine came into the street This seemed to break the tension which had seized Henrietta, and she turned and walked swiftly out of David's room and into her own.

She did not know what David did.

She knew that this was a climax, that their relationship

would never be the same again. She had often envisaged such a moment, when she would have to face the fact that the emotional situation would blow up in her face and she would have to leave him, and this house, and this work which had become part of her life.

She began to collect her personal things There were not many, practically everything but a dictionary, some pens and oddments were David's—hers by usage over the years but nevertheless, David's. She felt a strange and unfamiliar stinging pain at the back of her eyes. Then she squared her shoulders, consciously, and looked about her, like a bird, head turning in all directions. The books, so beloved, the desk, the pictures, all were there, each with its own particular significance for her.

Tight-lipped, tight-jawed, she went out of her room and into the passage. Her car was in the street, she could go to it through the front door, and pass David's window, or through the back door and stand no risk of being seen. She did not hesitate, but turned right, towards the back door. Her footsteps sounded clearly on the highly polished wooden boards.

Will he try to stop me? she wondered, but the thought did not make her pause. Reaching the door she went through, closing it carefully behind her, and stepped into the paved yard, with a closed wooden gate which opened on to the road—Glebe Crescent, S.W.3.

He wasn't coming.

He was letting her go.

She opened the gate, caught a nail on the latch, and winced; the wince turned into a sob.

Of course he was letting her go.

This was the end.

The car, a blue mini-Morris, was parked opposite the gate. Half-a dozen other cars were parked close by, but there were plenty of gaps, Glebe Crescent was too far from the shops and too thinly populated ever to be

crowded. She put down her bag and fumbled for her key. *Where the devil was it?* She couldn't, she *couldn't* have left it in her desk—if so, nothing would make her go back for it.

Suddenly she saw the blue tag to which it was fastened. Thank God! She took it out very carefully; whatever happened she mustn't drop it, she mustn't lose a second.

She pushed the key into the lock, and as she did so, saw a movement out of the corner of her eye, at the main gate of David's house. She felt a curious sensation: her heart seemed to turn over It wasn't David, of course, it was someone from the house next door; the gates were very close together.

She opened the car door.

It was David

She banged her knee on the door handle.

He was coming towards her.

She hadn't taken the key out of the door, she had to half-close the door to get at it.

He was almost at her side.

She pulled out the key and started to get in.

He was speaking to her.

. . .

'Don't go,' David said in a low-pitched voice 'Please don't go.'

She didn't look at him and didn't speak.

'Henrietta,' he went on, pleadingly, 'come and talk to me. Please don't go.'

She scrambled into the driving seat and pulled the door to behind her. She was trembling and it crossed her mind that she was in no condition to drive, all strength seemed to have been drained out of her.

He pulled the door open.

'Henrietta,' he begged, 'I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry. Please don't go away like this.'

His head and shoulders were inside the car and she could not close the door on him. He did not attempt to get in, just stood there, one hand outstretched but not moving.

If she weakened now, she realised, she would be forever at his mercy. If he could plead and win her after this, he could win whatever happened, and she must not give way. It would be madness—for him, for her. After what they had said they would never be the same again, it was useless even to try to patch this quarrel up.

She turned the key in the ignition.

'Please don't stay there,' she managed to say. 'It won't make any difference.'

The engine roared, more loudly than she intended, as she jabbed her foot on the accelerator pedal and let in the clutch.

'*David, let go!*' she said breathlessly. 'I'm not coming back Let me close the door.'

As she spoke, he stretched out his hand and pulled the key out of the ignition. The engine died away She snatched at the key but he closed his fingers over it.

'David!' she called desperately, 'give me my key!'

He ignored her, and walked back towards the house.

. . .

Roger West put down the receiver and went back to the kitchen, pulling a long face. He was a big, powerful man whose fair hair hid the grey streaks that his forty-odd years had brought. Janet, tall and attractive and looking younger than her years, noted his expression.

'Don't say you've got to go out again before dinner,' she said vexedly.

He pulled a chair from the table.

'I haven't got to go out at all,' he said. 'That was Bill Sloan, to tell me we've caught a fellow we've been after for several weeks. That was the case which might have kept me. When *is* dinner? Even when I do get home I don't get fed.'

She aimed a blow at him with an empty plate, but her eyes glowed with relief and pleasure.

4

THE CLASH

HENRIETTA sat at the wheel of the useless car, wondering what to do next. Staring straight ahead she saw David reach the main gate of the house and go inside. He did not look round.

'I'll *walk* rather than go after him!' she burst out, and touched the door handle, actually pushed the door open an inch; as she did so a child passed on a bicycle, and startled her. She pulled the door to quickly, and held it closed. She could just see the front door of Number 5, open; he expected her to go back, of course, was sure that she would.

If she didn't, if she walked——

She clenched her fist and banged the seat beside her.

She would still have to come back to get the car. She didn't need it again tonight, but she would certainly need it tomorrow . . .

She caught her breath, realising that there would be no need to drive here in the morning. Time and time and time again she had told herself that she must stop the situation between them from getting worse; now she had stopped it, there must be no going back.

So it was essential for her to get the key.

She got out of the car and closed the door quietly. The child cyclist was out of sight, but an elderly man was on the other side of the street: he touched his hat to her. She gave a mechanical smile and walked towards Number 5 as enraptured by its clean, Queen Anne lines and the tall windows, the warm red brickwork, and the fine,

white-painted door, as she had been when she first saw them.

She went in, soft-footed, then whispered to herself: 'It's no use pretending I'm not here.' She walked briskly towards David's study, the door of which stood open. Opposite were the stairs, shallow and elegant, like the whole house.

David was sitting at his desk, looking at her. The key was on the corner, where she always sat and where she often put it when he called her in from the hall.

'Come in, Henrietta,' he said in a steady voice.

Set-faced, she went towards the key.

'Sit down,' he said.

'No, I won't sit down,' said Henrietta. She nearly added: 'ever again' but this sounded cheap—she hated even thinking of saying it She was close to the key now, and wondered if he would snatch it up if she stretched out for it. He was perhaps a little less tense than he had been before, certainly that almost mask-like expression had gone.

She picked the key up.

'Goodbye,' she said.

'Henrietta, you're being silly.'

'I've been silly far too long,' she said. 'Goodbye.'

She began to turn; and she was not truly sure whether or not she wanted him to try to stop her. Pride, in a way, made her hope that he would, but anger still simmered close to the surface, and she knew that if he so much as touched her again she would lose her self-control. She hated doing that, for she had always prized her ability to keep her head no matter what the circumstances.

He did not move, and she stepped quickly towards the door.

'Henrietta!'

She ignored him.

'Henrietta,' he called in a sharper voice, 'come back

and talk to me. There isn't any need to make a fuss like this.'

She reached the door and trod on a slip mat—and two things happened at the same time. His chair scraped, she quickened her pace and the mat seemed to slide from under her. She tripped, falling backwards, and grabbed at the door frame to save herself—but this lost precious seconds, and before she could start moving again David had caught up with her. Instead of touching her, he passed and stood with his back to the door, to bar her passage.

'Get out of my way!' she ordered, breathlessly.

'Henrietta,' David said, 'I am not going to let you go until we've talked. I'm sorry I behaved so badly—I really am. I'll try to control myself in future, but——'

'You won't need to,' she said, decisively. 'I won't be here.'

She stepped forward, and for a moment thought he was going to let her pass Then at the last moment he shot his arm out, and held her. She felt a momentary impulse to struggle but realised this would be useless, so she stood absolutely still.

'Let me go, please.'

'Come and talk this over,' he insisted.

'We've talked too many things over,' she said. 'It gets us nowhere.'

'You can't walk out like this.'

'I can and I will,' insisted Henrietta, 'and if you try to hold me by force it will only make me more anxious to get away.'

She studied his face as she spoke, seeing a gradual change coming over it, the expression hardening, the light of pleading dying from his eyes. He would let her go, of course; it was what she wanted and knew was inevitable, yet at the same time what she hated and also what seemed impossible.

'For the last time,' he said, 'please come and talk sensibly.'

'For the last time,' she retorted, 'please let me go.'

He took his arm away, slowly. They stood still for a moment, as if each felt the almost mesmeric effect of the other's gaze. Then she stepped past him. She saw that it was raining quite heavily, but did not give it a second thought. This period in her life was over and there would be no going back.

She heard a faint rustle of movement behind her, and thought, he's going into the study. He's going.

Then his hands grasped her, fingers tight and painful on the top of her shoulders, and he spun her round. She was quite helpless, and staggered against him. He released her for a moment, then pulled her towards him so violently that the breath was almost squeezed out of her body. Holding the back of her head, he forced her face upwards and pressed his lips against hers.

She hated being kissed.

For long, long years, she had hated being kissed, had refused to allow a man to kiss her, other than touch her cheeks with his lips. Now, she felt the bruising pressure of David's lips on hers

She felt as if she would faint.

She sensed when he let her go, that she was falling

He held her up, and there was a note in his voice which almost pierced the mists of semi-consciousness.

'*Are you all right?*'

She couldn't speak. Her mouth seemed to burn. Her whole body was limp.

'*Are you all right?*' he cried

Suddenly, he lifted her in both arms and carried her; she felt him putting her down on the couch where, sometimes, they would sit and talk, he pouring out the distress which he had felt for so many years, she listening, prompting, allowing his hand to rest on her shoulder

with the gentle near-intimacy which was all he seemed to need in such times as those.

He pushed a cushion under her head and she was comfortable. She was not yet able to think clearly, and allowed thoughts to drift. She heard the chink of glass and realised he was pouring her a drink; yes, she could do with a drink, it would help her.

She mustn't stay; if she was sure of anything, it was that she mustn't stay.

She sensed that he was close to her again, and opened her eyes. He was bending down beside her, glass in hand, looking at her with a strained intensity. How clear his eyes were and how lined his face, especially at the corners of his mouth and eyes.

'Let me help you sit up,' he said.

'I'm—I'm all right.'

'No, let me help you.' He did so, gently, putting the cushion further down into the small of her back. Then he held the glass to her lips. 'Not poison,' he said drily. 'Just brandy.'

It did her good.

For the first time, she thought: 'What a silly thing to do,' and with the thought came another: 'What a *weak* thing to do.' To think that she should allow herself to be so affected because he had kissed her!

'Have another sip,' he urged.

She saw him glance up, and wondered why, then heard footsteps outside the front door, sharp and clear on the gravel drive; then they were inside the hall, muffled by carpet. She was facing the doorway, and saw a man appear in it—saw *Gerald*.

Everything that followed happened at lightning speed. She was aware of one thing upon another and yet they seemed to merge together and become blurred.

First she saw Gerry, pausing for a split-second, filling the doorway. He was a big man, heavier, stronger,

younger than David. Then she saw David, saw his expression, the rage on his face. She saw his hands, raised and clenched, and she saw him rush across the room.

Gerry looked up, startled; he thrust his arm up but failed to fend the blow off completely, and the sound of David's fist on Gerry's jaw sounded loud and clear.

'Stop it!' gasped Henrietta.

It was like trying to speak in a nightmare.

'*Stop it!*' she screamed, yet she knew she made no sound.

Gerry staggered to one side—then, regaining his balance, he swung round and struck David first with his right fist, then with his left.

David fell back, knocked against a chair, tried to save himself. But, half-crouching, Gerry hit him again and sent him sprawling into the fireplace.

Henrietta was sobbing to herself now, hating everything she saw, and yet she was watching with awful intensity and could not bring herself to look away.

Gerry bent down and gripped David's coat and tugged at him. There was a clatter of firearms, the gasping of the two men—and blood at the corner of David's mouth.

She tried to get off the couch; but could not move.

Gerry had hauled David to his feet, and let him go—and drew back his arm to strike again As he did so, David lunged forward, aiming another blow at Gerry's jaw Gerry hurtled backwards, staggered, then lost his balance and fell heavily across the metal fender.

Suddenly, Henrietta could move

As Gerry stumbled to his feet she leapt off the couch and sprang towards them. 'For heaven's sake,' she cried, 'behave like civilised people ' But neither man seemed to notice her; they stood glaring at each other; and in each, at that moment, there was a terrible hate.

But there was a gap between them, and Henrietta stepped into it, David on her right, Gerry on her left.

She had no idea what she would do if they ignored her and began to fight again.

5

'CIVILISED' MEN

THERE were three sounds: the furious, sickening thumping of Henrietta's heart, Gerry's heavy, measured breathing, and David's quick, shallow gasps for breath.

A fourth sound became audible: the ticking of the clock.

At last, Henrietta's heartbeats quietened; at last she felt that she dared step back. As she did so, David put a hand gingerly to his chin. There was a swelling on the side of his jaw and another on his left temple

He moistened his lips.

'Civilised people,' he said drily, glancing at Gerry.

Henrietta's heart began to thump again, but Gerry did not react except to move his left arm cautiously upwards; it looked as if it hurt him to do so. David put his clean hand towards his pocket and took out a handkerchief, but before he could raise it to his lips, Henrietta said quietly:

'You ought to bathe that first.'

His hand stopped moving.

'Yes, I suppose I ought,' he agreed. 'I'll go and do something about it.' He stepped unsteadily towards the door, and from it added: 'Give Mr. Ward a drink.'

'*Very* civilised of you,' Gerry said, harshly.

Henrietta shot him a sharp, reproving glance, and followed David through the doorway, across the hall, and into the tiny cloakroom at the back of the stairs. There was a first-aid box standing on a narrow window ledge and she opened it, then pulled some sections of soft paper towelling from a roll on a wall fixture.

David was leaning against the wall. He looked very tired, very old, and she went to him, quickly, and took his arm.

'You'll feel better when you've bathed your face,' she said. 'Let me help you with your coat.'

Very gently, she eased the jacket off and hung it on a peg. He began to fumble at a cuff-link and she unfastened it, then that on the other sleeve. He rolled his sleeves up himself, each movement an effort.

'I'm all right,' he said. 'Go and look after Ward. I don't want him left alone in my study.'

'Oh, David, please——'

'I don't want him alone in my study,' David rasped.

Henrietta stared at him, uncertainly, as he turned his back on her and lowered his head towards the basin. He seemed more himself, but she could not rid herself of the shock of seeing him looking so suddenly grey and old.

He was deliberately ignoring her; so she went out.

Before she turned towards the study, she stood quite still in the middle of the hall and weakness overcame her again; for a few seconds, everything swam round her Moving, almost blindly, to a chair, she lowered herself into it.

She had never seen men fight before.

She had never seen savagery and hate in a man before.

And she realised, suddenly, that these men must have been fighting over her.

. . .

'I enjoyed that,' said Roger West, with a heavy tone of surprise.

'Haven't you enjoyed my cooking before?' demanded Janet.

'Oh, occasionally,' he said, and put his hand over hers. 'How are the boys?'

'I hardly see them these days,' Janet said, a little woefully. 'They scramble down for breakfast and rush off without saying goodbye, and only come in if they're hungry.'

'Are they all right?' asked Roger, seriously.

Janet looked at him thoughtfully, and pushed her chair back.

'You don't see much of them at all these days, do you?' she said.

'I've been busy three week-ends in a row,' he reminded her. '*Are* they all right, Jan?'

'Yes,' she answered briskly. 'As far as they can be. Richard can think of nothing but his hopes of getting into television. Scoop still *works* at his painting but doesn't say much about it I think he's less sure than he was that it's the right life for him.'

'He'll find out,' Roger remarked.

'But he's wasting an awful lot of time when he could be training for something else,' Janet said.

Roger watched as she got up and began to clear the plates away. Coffee was percolating on the gas stove, a big, untouched trifle stood on the dresser, plates and spoons by it.

'You're worried about him, are you?' he asked.

Janet turned to look at him, and he could see that she was troubled; just as he could see that she was a very attractive woman who did not seem her age. She moved easily and usually smiled freely, but she was frowning now

'I think I will be if he doesn't decide what to do soon,' she said. 'You really ought to discuss it with him, dear' She picked up a spoon and plunged it into the trifle. 'You will be home this week-end, won't you?'

'Yes,' Roger promised. 'And I'll talk to Scoop.'

They were quiet as she put the trifle in front of him, and he picked up a jug of cream; quiet, as she sat down and they began to eat. The problem of his older child was always sobering, and Roger—whenever he thought about it—felt half-guilty because he allowed Martin-called-Scoop to drift, more than half-convinced that it was best to keep a very light rein on a boy in his late teens

He had nearly finished the trifle when the telephone bell rang. He pushed his chair back, flashed Janet an apologetic glance, stepped into the hall, and lifted the receiver.

'West.' He listened, then said sharply: '*Who?*'

Janet, watching him through the open doorway, knew then that this was no ordinary call. 'Who reported?' he was saying. 'Yes, quite right. I'll go along myself.'

Helplessly, hopelessly, Janet shook her head. He would have to go, of course, but that was not all: whenever he talked in this way, he *wanted* to go. He would always put his police work first, the boys and her afterwards No doubt it was inevitable and even right, but sometimes she reacted against it bitterly.

He replaced the receiver and came back. 'There's some trouble at Sir David Marshall's place,' he told her 'It's only just along the road, I shouldn't be very long.'

He had virtually forgotten her by the time he was out of the front door. It was raining, all the neighbours who had been in their gardens when he had come home had been driven indoors. His own garden looked neat and colourful, but now he hardly noticed it.

So far, all that he knew was that there had been some kind of a fight. That in itself was strange; one did not think of men of Marshall's calibre becoming involved in any sort of brawl. He was a student of social conditions in the countries of the British Commonwealth and a Consultant to the Government, and at the same time he

was bringing a series of Commonwealth reference books up to date His own work, as far as Roger knew, was the writing and editing of biographies of modern writers, comparing them with writers of similar status from past eras

Roger had been to his house some five years earlier—on a night when Lady Marshall had tried to kill herself. He remembered Marshall as the central figure in a kind of Greek tragedy, a man he had respected, but had not even begun to understand.

He wondered what changes the past five years had made in the man. He also wondered if this affair were as straightforward as the report made it sound, for often there were secret documents at Marshall's house, dealing with vital issues of Commonwealth relations. There had been at least one leakage of such documents which had set two emergent nations at each other's throats because details of British aid to each had been disclosed.

It was certainly a matter he should deal with himself.

. . .

Henrietta sat opposite the open front door, telling herself that she must go into the study and see Gerry. It was the last thing she wanted to do, but she had been sitting here for at least five minutes, and if she didn't hurry she would still be here when David came out of the cloakroom.

She gave an involuntary shudder, at the memory of the two men fighting.

Then she saw a car pass the gate, and a man at the wheel look into the drive. She had an impression of a good-looking man, very intent on the house. But it was too late for uninvited callers, and she was almost certain David was not expecting anyone; she must have imagined the stranger's interest.

Making a conscious effort she stood up and went towards the study.

The car had stopped and the man was getting out.

She hesitated, a hand on the study door, but before she opened it the man appeared at the gate. His stride was long, and he appeared to be in a hurry.

Henrietta turned away from the study, towards the front door.

The stranger reached the porch.

'Good evening,' he said.

'Good evening.'

'Is Sir David Marshall in?'

'I'm afraid'—Henrietta hesitated, wondering whether, in fact, David did expect the caller—'he's not free for some time.'

'I very much want to see him,' the stranger said 'I wonder if you'd be very kind and let him know I'm here.' As he spoke, he took a card from his pocket and handed it to her. His eyes were steely grey, and despite his diffident manner, Henrietta had an impression of great determination.

'*Chief Superintendent Roger West, New Scotland Yard*', she read.

'Does he know you are coming?' she asked, startled.

'I'm afraid he doesn't,' said the man from the Yard. 'It's Miss Lyle, isn't it? Sir David's secretary?'

Henrietta was astonished that he knew her name.

'Yes,' she said. Then, suddenly, she had a mental picture of David coming out of the cloakroom, his face puffy, his jaw swollen—the last thing he would want was to meet this man. All at once her mind slipped back to normal, and she knew exactly what to do.

'Do come in,' she said. 'Will you wait for a few minutes while I find out if Sir David is free?' Leading Roger through the hall, she ushered him into her own office, forgetting completely that she had left this house,

determined never to come back. 'I won't keep you long,' she added, and closed the door on him.

Quickly, she went across to the cloakroom and tapped. 'Just a moment,' called David. Henrietta stood waiting, wondering why on earth the man had come from the Yard just then.

The door opened, and she had quite a shock.

Even after bathing his face, David's jaw and temple were still badly swollen. Both eyes were puffy, and the front of his shirt was stained pink from blood.

'I'll go upstairs and change my shirt,' he said. 'Is there anything you need first?'

'*I* don't,' she said, 'but there's a policeman—a detective—from Scotland Yard here. You *can't* see him like that.'

'I don't know that I can see him at all,' David said. 'What does he want?'

'He didn't——' Henrietta began.

As she spoke, she heard a door open, saw David look suddenly past her. Swinging round, she saw Chief Superintendent West, who hadn't been fooled at all.

'Good evening, sir,' said West easily.

'Good evening,' responded David, obviously speaking with difficulty. 'How can I help you? It is Superintendent West, isn't it?'

'Yes, sir. I'm sorry to trouble you, but we received a report that you were having a spot of bother and might need some help.' Tactfully, West averted his gaze from David's face. 'I was informed and came at once, sir.'

His voice was not loud but it was clear and carrying Gerry must be able to hear every word, Henrietta thought. She remembered the passion and the hatred in David's voice, so short a time ago; now was the moment when he could really vent his spite.

'Don't, David,' she prayed silently, 'please don't.'

6

ADVICE FROM A POLICEMAN

My God, he's had a beating, thought Roger West, shocked. The feeling he had known earlier, that one did not associate such men as Marshall with this kind of violence, was even stronger. He waited for an answer, doubting whether he would get a true one, sensing the girl's anxiety.

Would Marshall pretend nothing of consequence had happened?

'I am afraid you were brought out on a fruitless errand,' David said at last 'Who made the report, Superintendent?'

'A neighbour, sir.' answered Roger

David smiled with some difficulty. 'Well, Superintendent, I'm grateful for your concern, but I'm afraid the neighbour was mistaken.'

Roger West hesitated.

In the same situation he would have reacted in much the same way as Marshall It did not seem likely that the fracas concerned government documents, nevertheless the possibility had to be kept in mind—yet there was virtually nothing he could do unless Marshall made a charge, and obviously he didn't intend to do so Roger was aware of the earnest gaze of the girl, without looking at her, then realised that he had no idea what had happened to the other man involved. He needed to find out.

'May I ask who was your assailant, sir?'

'There was no assailant,' David said flatly. 'Just a

quarrel between two friends. Nothing at all to worry about, Superintendent.'

The girl seemed suddenly to relax. In what way was she involved? wondered Roger. Had the fight been over her? Was she afraid for the other man?

'A rather violent quarrel, sir,' he murmured.

'Quarrels tend to be violent if tempers are lost. Superintendent, I must ask you to leave me to settle my personal affairs myself.'

'Yes, of course, sir.' Roger spoke soothingly 'But there *is* a stage when personal affairs become public. Sir David, did this quarrel in any way concern documents which are entrusted to you in connection with your work with Commonwealth affairs?'

David looked genuinely startled.

'Not in any way,' he answered

'I'm glad to hear it, sir. Where is the other person involved?'

'I really don't see——'

'I would like to assure myself that he is no more badly hurt than you,' Roger said flatly.

If Marshall made more difficulties then he might well have something to hide, he thought. The girl was alarmed again, he noticed, and she glanced towards a door close by the one which led to her office. Was the other man in there?

'I must say that I think you *are* being a little overzealous, Superintendent,' said Marshall. 'Henrietta—did Mr. Ward leave?'

'I'm not sure,' the girl replied.

'Will you find out.'

She moved quickly to the door at which she had glanced, and Roger noticed how slim she was, and how slender-waisted. Swinging the door open, she stood in the doorway, her back to the two men in the hall. Obviously she saw someone in the room beyond, but

Roger did not follow her; if he angered Marshall further, he might cause a lot of unnecessary trouble.

'Are you all right?' the girl asked.

'Yes, *I'm* all right. How is he?'

'I'll live,' said Marshall, moving towards the open doorway 'You'd better come into the study, Superintendent, and meet my protagonist.'

West followed him into the large, book-lined room, with its big tall windows opening on to smooth velvet lawns, and found himself facing a heavily-built man in his late thirties, his eyes startlingly dark in his pale face. Henrietta Lyle was standing beside him.

'It appears that we were overlooked when we had our difference of opinion,' Marshall went on drily. 'This is Superintendent West, of Scotland Yard.'

Ward looked up sharply.

'Good God!' he exclaimed. 'Nothing better to do, Superintendent?'

'Is there a better job than keeping the peace?' asked Roger mildly 'If you must have a private feud, gentlemen, I suggest you have the front door closed and the curtains drawn.' He smiled rather grimly at Marshall. 'Perhaps it's as well that I came round myself instead of sending junior officers, Sir David. Are you quite sure there's nothing I can do to help?'

'Quite sure, Superintendent -and I'm most appreciative of your attitude.'

'Then I'll be on my way, sir.'

'May I—ah—ask whether this will be officially reported?' Marshall asked.

'It won't reach the newspapers, sir—not through us, at all events.'

'I'm most grateful. Will you have a drink?'

'No, thank you, sir,' Roger paused, expecting the younger man to make some comment, but when none

was forthcoming he went towards the door Marshall moved after him.

'I can see myself out, sir, thank you.'

The girl had slipped past Marshall; now she opened the door and led the way into the hall. Roger appeared to be going after her but suddenly swung round and looked directly at Ward.

'Do *you* wish to make a complaint, Mr Ward?'

'Complaint?' echoed Ward. The dark eyes flashed from Roger to David, then back again to Roger. 'No, certainly not.'

Roger nodded, and this time went to the front door, the girl preceding him. He was impressed by the grace of her movements as well as by her promptness; she seemed to anticipate what was needed of her. As she turned, he saw that she was looking more relaxed now, and for the first time Roger noticed how clear her eyes were, and how beautiful a blue. She had small, nicely-shaped features and a very clear, slightly sallow skin. Now that he had a chance to look at her more attentively and in a better light, he realised how attractive she was.

Attractive enough to be fought over?

He was guessing, of course, and he decided there was no point in trying to confirm his guess. If this were the case, it was none of his business He smiled.

'Thank you, Miss Lyle Goodnight'

She smiled back at him. 'Goodnight, Superintendent.'

Roger West went briskly to his car and drove away immediately. It had stopped raining now, and several neighbours were back in their gardens. A boy on a bicycle stared after him and Roger had a sense that he had been recognised. By the time he reached the corner of the street, however, he had put everything to the back of his mind, except a picture of the girl's face. It was not often that he was so impressed; there was a quality in Henrietta Lyle which might indeed have sparked off the

trouble. If it had, then more trouble might develop, and it might be a good idea to keep an eye on Marshall and perhaps the girl. He would have a word with the Superintendent of the Chelsea Division, say that Marshall's house might be broken into, or some such excuse. In fact it wouldn't be a bad idea to go and see the man on nights at Chelsea, and refresh his memory about Sir David and his wife.

Wife—yes.

It was easy to forget that there *was* a wife, who still had her rights by law. What had happened to her?

It was a pity in a way that he couldn't go straight home, but he needn't be long and Janet could amuse herself looking at television.

. . .

Closing the front door, Henrietta could hear David and Gerry talking in the study. Should she go in to them, she wondered. Suddenly she realised that her bag was in the study. She would have to fetch it.

She hesitated.

There was a whole string of unpleasant situations to face in the immediate future—situations which both David and Gerry seemed to relish, but which she hated.

Why *must* men want everything so cut and dried and exactly as *they* wanted it?

She was perfectly satisfied with things as they were, working for David, enjoying his friendship. Often, since Yolande had gone, they spent all day here, having lunch and tea and sometimes supper together, and now and again he would take her out to dinner or to the theatre. They were always the slightly delicate minutes on parting; he never wanted to leave her, never wanted to let her go. But he was never over-insistent.

If only he hadn't developed this ridiculous, almost obsessive antagonism towards Gerry.

And Gerry was nearly as bad; he, too, she sometimes thought, seemed almost obsessed. Over and over again he would steer the conversation round to David: what was he doing, where was he going, when was he coming back? He couldn't possibly be really interested, so it could only be because he was jealous.

It was as if each man bitterly resented any affection she might have for the other.

All these things passed through her mind as she waited outside the study door, unable to make up her mind whether to go into the study or not. She listened. At least the two were not shouting at each other, they were behaving like reasonable human beings.

Then she remembered the fight—and clenched her teeth.

Suddenly David's voice rose, for the first time.

'I really see no point in discussing it further, Mr. Ward.'

Henrietta opened the door and walked into the room.

'He's gone,' she said shortly.

'Henrietta——' began Gerry, getting to his feet.

'Don't let's talk any more now,' she said quietly. 'I'm going home.' She looked round for her bag, saw it on the corner of the desk, and picked it up. 'Goodnight, David. Goodnight, Gerry.' She turned quickly, by no means sure that these were the right tactics but nearly certain that once she left, Gerry would follow; the important thing was that the two men were not left together any longer.

David stood up behind his desk. 'I'll see you in the morning, Henrietta. Goodnight, my dear.'

This was the moment to remind him that she wouldn't be in tomorrow, but if she did, then Gerry would guess what had happened, and she didn't want to talk about

it—certainly not this evening. She looked across the desk at David, forced a smile, hardly glanced at Gerry, and went out.

She was halfway across the hall before footsteps told her that Gerry was coming after her. He did not call, but caught up with her on the porch—it was he who closed the door. As they walked towards the gate together, she saw David at the study window. He often stood there when she left after they had argued, or differed, or if they had been more than ordinarily close in mood.

He did not smile and did not wave his hand; and nor did she.

'Henrietta, we've *got* to talk,' Gerald began, as she turned into the road.

Henrietta stared ahead.

'I'm not at all sure I want to talk to you,' she said stiffly. 'You had no right to burst in like that. You behaved like a lout.'

'On the contrary,' Gerry said, 'it was David Marshall who behaved like a lout. Good lord! I saw him push you around as if you belonged to him. If I ever see him do that again——'

They had reached her car and she stopped, turned, and looked at him without expression.

'I don't want to talk about it.' She opened the car door.

Then Gerry did what David so often contrived to do—looked at her with a helpless, hurt look, in which there was contrition and pleading and a hint of despair. She steeled herself against it, and got into the car, but before she could close the door behind her, he leaned forward.

'Please come and have dinner with me. I have to fly over to Milan for a couple of weeks and I'll be leaving tomorrow afternoon. That's why I telephoned. I wouldn't have interrupted you while you were working

but for that.' He paused. 'Please come and have dinner,' he said again. 'David Marshall can have your undivided attention for fourteen days in a row while I'm away, but let me give you dinner tonight, if only to show that you've forgiven me.'

Looking up into those dark, magnetic eyes, Henrietta hesitated—and was lost.

7

WARNING OVER DINNER

As Gerry ate, Henrietta noticed that he used his left arm and hand gingerly, but she said nothing about it for some time Whatever happened, she told herself, she must keep off anything controversial, anything which Gerry might take to be a reproach. He had brought her to a restaurant in Fulham Road, a spot in which the tables were placed in small alcoves where customers could dine *tête-à-tête* and where, if they kept their voices low, they could talk without risk of being overheard. Gerry looked pale and one of his eyes was bloodshot, but he was at his liveliest He was the quick-witted if rather over-gay Gerry, the kind of man whom, in theory, she could not like but who, in person, was very likeable. He could make fun out of the least likely situation and his running commentary on other diners, the service, the food, did much to take her mind off the day's problems.

But he could not dispel them completely However hard he tried, however hard *she* tried, still they lurked on the horizon of her mind like dark clouds, threatening to obscure the sun. Sometimes they loomed nearer, and in those moments she felt almost afraid, as if she were being drawn into a situation beyond her control; then Gerry would drive such ominous fears away with a flippant remark which set her laughing.

A small, red-jacketed waiter came up with coffee in a silver pot.

'Will you have a liqueur, sir?'

Gerry glanced enquiringly at Henrietta, and she shook her head.

'Not tonight' He reached awkwardly for the sugar to push it nearer to Henrietta, and almost knocked the cream over. She glanced up—and saw the way he flinched.

'Gerry, what is it?'

'Nothing at all, Hetty. Just a broken arm.'

'No, be serious.'

'I don't think it is broken, but it's devilish painful when I move it,' Gerry said. 'Warning to ardent lovers: beware the loved one's employer.'

Henrietta stared at him, wondering what to say. It had been inevitable that they should talk about what had happened and yet she had kept putting it off, hoping that perhaps it could be avoided. Now, she wondered how to keep the mood calm and unemotional.

'Gerry,' she said, 'I'm worried about your arm.'

'So am I. As soon as I've seen you home I'll go and have a word with a doctor pal of mine. She'll tell me whether there's any real damage done, and if she thinks there is, I can have it X-rayed in the morning.'

'You ought to go now. We must finish the coffee, and——'

'Hetty, dear,' said Gerry, 'you have to face up to the facts of life sooner or later, and it's no use tucking this particular skeleton away—it's got too much life in it.' His right hand closed over hers, and pressed gently. 'Your David Marshall's as mad as his wife.'

'Gerry, you shouldn't talk like that.'

'The truth is the truth. Let's face it.'

'He is the sanest man I know.'

'He's not sane, and you know it.'

'I'm not going to argue,' Henrietta said.

'Just for once you are,' said Gerry. 'No more evasions, they don't get you anywhere except into trouble. He'll drive you mad, too.'

'Gerry——'

'Like he drove his wife mad.'

Henrietta felt a sense of shock and anger. 'That's a wicked thing to say.'

'It was a wicked thing to do.'

'*She* nearly drove *him* mad!'

'That's the way he would put it to you, but——'

'You forget I worked for him while she was still there.'

'I don't forget anything. He fell in love with you, and had to get rid of Yolande. He succeeded.'

There was a long pause.

'You hate him, don't you?' Henrietta said at last.

Gerry looked at her very evenly, for a long time, while customers passed, and waiters passed, and Luigi, the proprietor, who came to ask if they had enjoyed the meal, passed also, because of the expression on his face. Henrietta wanted to look away, but could not make herself do so.

At last Gerry answered. 'Yes,' he said slowly, 'I do hate him. He stands between me and everything I want. You. But it won't be for long, Henrietta.'

A curious smile played about his lips, and suddenly Henrietta felt strangely afraid. All at once Gerry's face, the table, the candles, the entire restaurant, swam around her, and she felt a sudden mental and physical exhaustion She couldn't stand any more—she must get home.

'Let's go, Gerry. Take me home—please.'

He sprang to his feet and came round to her, pulling back her chair, stretching out his hand to take hers. A few minutes later they were in the street.

The cool night air made her feel better, but even so it was with a sigh of relief that she reached her car. Evading Gerry's tightening arm, she slipped swiftly inside.

'But Hetty——' Gerry's face showed his disappointment, 'you're *not* going home straight away? I thought we'd go for a little stroll——'

But for once she was able to resist the power of the dark, persuasive eyes.

'Not tonight, Gerry. I really am terribly tired.'

'But Hetty——' Gerry's disappointment had turned to petulance, and suddenly Henrietta felt hunted, harried, pursued. Was this the way a fox felt, she wondered desperately, surrounded by the slavering pink tongues and shiny teeth of the hounds, the inane, terrifying savagery of the men who spurred them on? She had a sudden vision of a small, brown body, running, running . . . and hot tears pricked her eyes.

Quickly she slammed the car door.

'Goodnight, Gerry,' she called through the open window.

. . .

Joining the main stream of traffic at the corner of the street, she drove slowly and with great care, trying not to think. Yet thoughts came, unbidden. What had Gerry meant when he said that David had driven Yolande mad?—that he himself was mad?

She felt as cold as ice.

She was able to park the little car near the house where she had a small but very pleasant two-room flat, so she didn't have far to walk. She found the street door open, as it usually was until midnight, and went up to the top floor, which was hers. The staircase and landing were well-lit, and she opened the door with her key, switched on the light, then closed the door behind her.

Thank goodness David hadn't come. If he had——

She saw a white envelope on the mat and picked it up. His handwriting seemed to leap at her from the envelope. Dully, she thought: 'I needn't open it tonight.' But she knew that she would have to, that, tired though she was, she was physically incapable of going to bed with

the letter unopened. She dropped her bag and gloves on to the couch in the sitting-room, and opened the letter.

It said simply: 'Please telephone me. David.'

8

THE PROMISE

'No,' Henrietta said aloud, 'No. I can't.'

She sat on the arm of the couch, the note in her hand. All she wanted was a long, slow bath, and to sleep and sleep and sleep.

'I can't,' she said again.

She did not get up for some time, and by the time she did begin to move about, she felt less adamant. What did David want? To say he was sorry, or to ask her to come back? Slowly, Gerry faded into the back of her mind, David came to the front, and she felt an unfamiliar sensation, an emotion she had known only slightly before. She had first experienced it soon after beginning to work for David and before she had learned of the truth about Yolande. It was a kind of excitement, of eagerness.

It was still only half-past ten; she could make up her mind to telephone later. She did a few kitchen chores, it was amazing how dusty everything got even when she wasn't in all day, then suddenly swung round to the telephone. She wouldn't rest until she knew what he wanted.

She dialled, slowly. FLA . . .

David answered so quickly that she knew he was sitting at his desk.

'This is David Marshall.'

'Hallo, David,' said Henrietta slowly.

He caught his breath.

'Bless you for calling,' he said gruffly. 'You must be worn out.'

'I am, rather.'

'Then I won't keep you long.' His voice was tightly

controlled, he was making as sure as he could that he did nothing to exasperate her. 'Please come in the morning. Whatever you decide to do about staying with me, please come tomorrow.'

'Very well,' she said. The words were cool, the tone was cool, and she did not intend that. But he did not appear to notice.

'That's—a great relief,' he said. 'You don't know how great. One other thing——'

'Yes?'

'How is Ward's arm? He came down with a terrific bump, and I think he caught it on the fender'

Henrietta frowned. How *was* Gerry's arm, she wondered.

'Well, I think it has been aching a bit, but he's going to see a doctor friend tonight He has to fly to Milan tomorrow and won't be back for a week or two.'

'Oh.' David sounded surprised, and seemed to check himself from saying something else.

'He—he thought you were hurting me, or I'm sure he wouldn't have come in as he did.' She hadn't intended to say this, but suddenly the words came out with a rush. 'I'm sorry about it, you disliked him enough as it was.'

'Don't worry about that,' said David. He paused. 'Goodnight, Henrietta,' he added suddenly. 'I—I love you very much.'

'Goodnight, David.' Henrietta's voice was soft. 'I'm glad I'll see you in the morning.'

She rang off and sat back on the couch for a few minutes, not quite sure how she felt but much more relaxed than she had been. David had sounded very composed; perhaps he had fought a battle with himself, perhaps from tonight on, if she did carry on working for him, things would be better. She glanced at the telephone. Would it be wise to telephone Gerry? He must

be feeling very low, especially with that arm. And as she'd telephoned David—oh, that was absurd, she didn't have to treat them both alike!

But she dialled Gerry's number, nevertheless.

There was no answer.

'Perhaps it's just as well,' she said aloud, and went to run her bath.

. . .

That was about the time that Roger West opened the front door of his house in Bell Street, and went in. Immediately, he heard Janet laughing, heard Richard telling some far-fetched tale of a triumph he had had at work. As Roger entered the living-room, Richard broke off.

'Hi, Dad, fancy seeing you! Let me just finish telling Mum this . . . And there it was, on my desk, beautifully typed, you know my typing! Exactly what he wanted. I'd written it even before he asked for it!—talking about my boss, Dad—*that* shook him.'

'I'll bet it did if you had less than one typing error a sentence,' said Roger. He went across and kissed Janet on the cheek. 'Sorry, sweet. Hope the evening didn't drag.'

'Scoop came in almost as soon as you'd gone,' said Janet, 'and then Richard. Was it anything serious?'

'In a funny way, believe it or not, I don't really know,' said Roger.

And it was true.

It was equally true next morning, as he drove along the Embankment to the Yard, went through the reports on his desk, heard the tale of the night's misdeeds, none of which appeared to be particularly outstanding, and dictated a few letters, mostly answers to queries from County police forces. There was a light drizzle outside,

and the office was cold and clammy. He kept pondering all he had heard about Lady Marshall and her husband from the Chelsea night Superintendent, and at eleven o'clock lifted the telephone.

'Is Mr. Coppell in?' he asked.

'Yes, sir.'

'Put me through, please . . . Hallo,' he said when the rather deep but casual voice of the Commander answered. 'Can you spare me a few minutes, sir?'

'It would help if I know who you are,' said Coppell. It was characteristic that although he must have recognised Roger's voice instantly, he preferred to pretend he had not, and to imply a reproof. One got used to Coppell after a while, but such a start was always off-putting.

'Chief Superintendent West,' Roger said, precisely.

'Oh, West. What's it all about?'

'It's difficult over the telephone, sir,' Roger answered.

'Hmphh. Better come along, then'

Coppell rang off, and Roger put the telephone down slowly, and as slowly turned and went to the window. He stared out at the smooth, oily-looking surface of the Thames, and the grey mist, heavy enough to blur the outlines of Westminster Bridge, the London County Hall, and the new block buildings almost opposite the Yard. One day he would explode with Coppell—but he would gain nothing except satisfaction that he had torn a strip off the man. It certainly wouldn't do his pension any good, and it wouldn't recommend itself to Janet.

He found himself laughing; then remembered what had happened the previous evening when Marshall and Ward had lost their tempers. He was in a calmer frame of mind as he walked along the bare corridors towards the Commander's office.

It was also characteristic that Coppell, having made himself felt, should be affable, even hospitable.

'Come in, West . . . Cigarette? . . . Sit down.' He lit

his pipe as Roger lit his cigarette, settled back in an armchair, and waited

'How well do you remember Sir David Marshall, sir?'

Coppell's heavy eyes widened momentarily, life seemed to glow in his fleshy, sallow cheeks.

'Very well. The Commonwealth Secretary blew his top when some documents Marshall had were mislaid—thought it was Marshall's fault, but it wasn't. The Commonwealth countries are so infernally sensitive these days we have to be devilish careful. What's he been up to?'

Does he *expect* Marshall to have been 'up to' something? wondered Roger.

'One of his neighbours . . .' he began, and told the story succinctly, having no doubt at all of Coppell's deep interest; his exasperation with the man had gone completely. He finished the direct report, and then went on: 'I looked in at Chelsea, after I'd left Marshall, sir.'

'Forrest on duty?'

He knew his stuff all right, noted Roger.

'Yes.'

'What did he say?'

'He remembered the beginning of the official trouble with Lady Marshall very well,' Roger said. 'She tried to kill herself—went absolutely off her head, apparently.'

Coppell pulled at his pipe. 'What else?' he asked.

'She went to a private sanatorium at Richmond been there ever since.'

'Yes, but don't tell me Forrest left it at that,' growled Coppell.

'He said that Lady Marshall had received a series of anonymous letters, some accusing her husband of having an affair and planning to divorce her, others saying she was as mad as a hatter and ought to be in a home. The writer of the letters was never discovered.'

'Forrest make any guesses?'

'No, sir,' said Roger, puzzled. 'He didn't say anyone was suspected.'

'Cagey devil,' remarked Coppell, obviously with approval. 'Well, I'll tell you what *I* thought, and I wasn't the only one. I thought Sir David had decided to send her round the bend. Devilish cruel thing to do, if he did—don't quote me, now.' He puffed away, more human than Roger had ever known him. 'Mind you, she led him a hell of a life. Tragic, whichever way you look at it.'

Roger, recovering, phrased a question carefully.

'Did you have grounds for suspecting the husband?'

'You'd call it a bunch, Handsome.'

'Was there any circumstantial evidence?'

'Couldn't find anyone else with a motive,' Coppell said. 'Know they're first cousins, don't you?'

'I didn't.'

'Well, they are. And *she's* got the money.'

'Lady Marshall has?'

'He's got what he makes, she's got a quarter of a million.' Coppell chuckled. 'Not like you to let me tell *you* anything about a case, Handsome! You haven't done your homework on this one.'

'Obviously not, sir,' Roger said ruefully. 'It's time I did.'

'Yes.' Coppell studied him closely for an appreciable time, then took his pipe from his mouth. 'What made you go round to Marshall's place yourself?' he asked.

Roger hesitated.

'Go on. There must have been a reason.'

'I didn't want unnecessary trouble with a man of Marshall's reputation, for one thing. I knew about the confidential documents and the trouble over the lot that were mislaid. And I suppose there was something at the back of my mind about this personal situation—can't say

I remember much about it—though I did go round on the night of the affair itself.'

'You wouldn't,' said Coppell. 'You went to New York at the time—lucky so-and-so. The Press didn't get hold of the story of the letters. There was no question of blackmail, nothing except what looked like an obvious attempt to send her off her rocker. Think this thing will develop?'

Roger shrugged. 'No telling, sir.'

'Think Ward and Marshall were fighting over the Lyle girl?'

'Possibly.'

'The letters started coming when she'd been working for Marshall for nearly a year,' said Coppell. 'She didn't know it, but she was watched very closely for over a month. Not the slightest reason to suspect her.'

'She knew about the letters, presumably,' Roger said.

'Not unless Marshall told her.'

'You mean *we* didn't question her?' Roger sounded incredulous, and it was immediately obvious that he'd said the wrong thing.

'We made quite sure she had nothing to do with them,' Coppell said, stiffly.

'Was Marshall fond of her then?'

'There's no evidence that he was,' answered Coppell. 'But all the evidence and reports are on file, and since you've already poked your nose into Marshall's affairs, you might as well have a look at them. Then you'll be able to make sure that all of us on the case did our job properly,' he added drily.

He's protesting too much, thought Roger. 'Is it all right if I dig a little?' he asked

'Do what you like,' said Coppell. 'We'll give priority to anything urgent that crops up. Such as proving that Marshall knew about those letters to his wife,' he murmured.

9

DECISION

HENRIETTA pulled up outside Number 5 Glebe Cresent, almost opposite the study window. She did not get out of the car immediately. It was futile to want to put back the clock; but how she wished that she could go back even to yesterday afternoon, with David in his tormented mood and she treading warily, never sure that she would not make a remark which would worsen his mood, either driving him to protest against her lack of feeling or thrusting him further back into a despondency which she felt duty-bound to try to lift.

Duty-bound?

Why was she always so convinced that she must help David out of a mood of despondency? Because she would help anyone? Or because he was David? Until she answered the question honestly to herself, she wouldn't be able to think clearly or to judge her own emotions. On that thought, she stirred herself and got out of the car, locked it, and went to the house, glancing up and down. There were only fifteen houses in Glebe Crescent, eight on the other side, seven, rather larger, on this. Except for one at the far end, a Queen Anne house built in the days when this whole area had been meadow or farmland, David's was the best—far enough back from the road to appear remote, yet close enough to be seen clearly. The wide, smooth lawns, the rose beds, the flagstones of the paths, were beautiful and distinctive.

It was an elegant house, in an elegant setting, and she would hate to leave it.

She nearly had left it—and perhaps, indeed, she had.

David had only to make the decision that having her here simply on a friend-secretary basis was too disturbing. He might already have reached the decision in the cold light of morning. Yesterday's crisis might have been the turning point.

If he had, she couldn't possibly blame him.

And, in some ways, she would welcome it.

She reached the front door, key in hand, and then said quite loudly: 'No I wouldn't. I'd hate it. I'd never get over it!'

Alarmed, she wondered whether David was in the hall. If he were he would have heard that, and one of his first questions would be, 'What would you never get over?'

He wasn't in the hall.

He was often at his study window, or at the door.

She hesitated, then tapped at the study door, to let him know she was in—but had he been in the study, he would have seen her, and surely made some sign. In some moods, when he had been hurt or affronted by something she had said or done unwittingly, he would wait for her to tap, and she could tell his mood by his tone of voice.

She tapped more loudly, but there was no answer.

Disappointed, she went to her own room, half-expecting to find him there, but this was empty, too. There were some letters on her desk with notes on how they should be answered, and her heart leapt. He *hadn't* taken her resignation literally! She took off her coat and draped it over a chair, pinned up a stray wisp of hair, took the cover off the typewriter and tidied the oddments on her desk. It was hard to believe that that police officer, West, had been in here She recalled West vividly: his good looks, the hint of strength held on a leash, the easy exercise of self-control.

Where *was* David?

She heard a footstep in the hall, and for the second

time her heart leapt. His tread was brisk and firm. She half-rose from her chair as the door opened and he appeared. On that instant, and in spite of his swollen eye and mouth, she sensed that he was much calmer than she had known him for some time.

'Hallo, Henrietta!' He held out both hands as he came towards her. She rounded the desk and they gripped hands for a moment, then he put his arms round her, kissing both her cheeks before standing back.

Her eyes were glowing.

'Good morning, David!'

He smiled. 'And in spite of the storm last night, you look lovely,' he said.

'Thank you, kind sir!'

'I should say you slept untroubled and long.'

'I took a sleeping tablet,' she said simply.

'The practical Miss Lyle! Let's go into the study, I've things to talk about.' He moved towards the communicating door and stopped suddenly to take her hands again. '*Are* you all right?' he demanded, looking at her intently. '*Really* all right?'

'I think so,' she said. 'As far as I *can* be, first thing in the morning.'

He laughed, and let her go. 'Whatever you do, Henrietta, don't ever change,' he told her, holding the study door open for her to walk through.

A shaft of sunlight filled the room with an unfamiliar radiance. He had tidied up, and his own desk was in its usual immaculate order. He waited for her to sit down, studied her appraisingly, then, quite soberly, he said:

'I've made a decision.'

Suddenly, painfully, her heart contracted. She did not look away from him or change her expression, but slowly her blood seemed to turn cold. He had made a decision: he had decided not to go on trying to work out their relationship, but to take her at her word.

'I hope it's the right one.' She did not know how she made herself answer him.

'It's on your advice,' he said.

Again she forced herself to speak.

'Then you ought to be very careful.'

'Henrietta,' he said. 'I *am* over-tired, and if I don't have a rest I shall go to pieces. So I'm going to fly to Miami and stay with my cousin Chloe for two or three weeks until I feel—rested.'

. . .

He was going to Miami!
He was going to take a holiday!
Oh, what a fool she was.
Thank God, thank God!

. . .

David said: 'You don't seem very surprised. In fact you look delighted at the prospect of getting rid of me for a while.'

'Oh, I am! I——' Suddenly she realised what she had said, had a flash of alarm lest he should take it literally 'I mean——' she amended, and then he chuckled and she found herself laughing. 'I mean I'm delighted that you're going away. I shall miss you, terribly, but——'

He laughed again. 'Oh, terribly,' he echoed, drily. Then he grew serious. 'I *can* forget what you said about leaving, can't I?' he asked. The question was almost absurd, coming at her moment of almost wild relief, and she didn't answer at once; and for the first time that morning he looked anxious. 'I simply can't bear the thought of you leaving,' he went on. 'I hoped that if I were away for a while you could have a spell without constant harassment.'

'Oh, don't be silly,' she replied. 'You don't harass me at all.'

'I do very much, sometimes,' he said soberly. 'You will stay, won't you?'

'Of course I'll stay!'

He looked at her a little uncertainly, then gave a faint smile.

'You said that as if you really want to.' Before she could comment, he went on: 'You can manage here on you own, can't you?'

'There's at least enough research to keep me busy for a month, quite apart from day-to-day routine,' she assured him. 'David—truly—I'm *very* glad. I'm sure it will do you a world of good. You want to get away from everybody and everything. In three weeks time you'll be absolutely on top of yourself!'

'I hope so,' he said, slowly. 'You've got one thing wrong, though. I do *not* want to go away from you, I'd be a thousand times happier if you would come with me.' He paused, as if half-hoping to see some kind of 'I'd love to come' expression in her eyes. 'What I would most like in this world is for you to live here, with me,' he went on, after a moment's pause. 'You do know that, don't you?'

'It—it wouldn't work out, David. It really wouldn't.'

'I suppose I *am* right,' she thought, 'I suppose it *wouldn't* work.'

He leaned forward across the desk

'Henrietta,' he said, 'think about it while I'm away. Call it ungallant of me if you like, but you aren't getting any younger. Nor am I. We're wasting an awful lot of time—time we won't have again Think seriously about it. We could get a living-in housekeeper to act as chaperone'—he was making himself speak lightly, but he was very much in earnest—'you *will* think about it, won't you? Promise me.'

'Of course,' she said gently. 'And David – don't think I'm not deeply touched. But you may have changed your mind when you get back, so let's wait until then.'

He stretched forward and touched her hands.

'I'm going to fly,' he said. 'I've already telephoned for a flight to New York and a connection for Miami, and I've written a note to Chloe. That's why I was out when you arrived. I wanted to catch the first post. When does Ward go to Milan, by the way?'

'This afternoon.'

'Have you any news of his arm?'

'None since I told you last night.'

'I hope it isn't too serious,' David said slowly. Then, all at once, he seemed to push out of his mind thought of everything but the coming trip and what she would have to do while he was away, and she saw yet another demonstration of his quite remarkable power of concentration.

There was no one, there could never be anyone, quite like him.

. . .

Roger West lunched in his office on a sandwich and a pint of beer, and studied the file on the Marshall case. It was surprisingly scrappy, and it became increasingly obvious to Roger that Coppell had never taken the case particularly seriously.

There were some notes on the law as it applied to anonymous letters.

There was a pencilled note, initialled by Jim Forrest, who was still at Chelsea:

No one appears to have the slightest motive except Marshall himself. He would obviously benefit if his wife were put away.

And there was a note signed by Coppell:

There is no change in Marshall's domestic habits. The idea that with his wife away the woman Lyle might move in, has proved unjustified.

Roger felt a touch of pleasure from his knowledge that, after two years, that situation still remained unchanged. He was rechecking the notes and reports in the file when his telephone rang. Still reading, he stretched out a hand for the receiver.

'West here.'

'Handsome?' It was Coppell. 'Funny thing's happened —you'd better check on it right away. Lady Marshall's had another letter, at the nursing home this time. The address is in the file. Go and find out what you can, will you? The woman you want to see is a Dr. Courtways— Doris Courtways.'

10

THE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

'It is, I'm afraid, essential that we intercept all correspondence to our patients,' said Dr. Courtways. She was tall, an angular, handsome, Scandinavian blonde, very forthright in manner. 'We have to make absolutely certain that they receive no communications which might upset or worry them in any way. The slightest emotional disturbance might do incalculable harm. Here is the letter which arrived for Lady Marshall this morning.'

She handed Roger West an envelope which had an S.W.1. postmark.

The envelope had already been opened, and Roger took out a folded sheet of cheap writing-paper. There was no address, and no signature—simply a message clumsily printed in block capitals.

> *You're no more mad than I am,* Roger read. *But you will be if you stay in that hell-hole any longer. Your husband wants to get rid of you. That's why he had you imprisoned there.*

Roger read it three times. Hell-hole? he wondered He had just driven through beautifully kept grounds to an Elizabethan house of rare beauty, furnished as if it were a rich man's beloved home. The brochure, a copy of which was on file at the Yard, stated that every patient had their own bedroom, bathroom, and sitting-room. In these days of hospital over-crowding, of shortage of medical staff, this was luxury.

'Are you Lady Marshall's personal physician?' he asked.

'One of two—yes. Dr. Smith is her consultant, but he is not resident here.'

'Plato Smith?' asked Roger.

'Yes.'

There was not the slightest need, in view of this, Roger realised, to doubt the absolute reliability of either the nursing home or the medical supervision. Plato Smith was an accepted authority on mental disorders, and was frequently consulted in cases of dispute in the civil courts. He had been called several times by defending counsel in criminal cases, twice in respect of murder, when the defence had been one of diminished responsibility due to insanity.

'So I may take it that the first sentence is not true,' Roger said drily.

'You may indeed, Superintendent.' Dr. Courtways was not even slightly amused.

'Is there any improvement in Lady Marshall's condition?'

'If she is kept unexcited and under constant supervision, she lives an outwardly normal life. But after visits from her husband she becomes very violent, and recently, I'm sorry to say, she has shown certain signs of deterioration.'

'Homicidally inclined?' asked Roger.

'Yes. If you care to see the record——'

'Later, please. How often does her husband visit her?'

'Perhaps once every two months. Sir David used to come much more often, but we dissuaded him because of of his wife's inevitable relapse afterwards.'

'I see. Did you tell him why you asked him to reduce the visits?'

'Yes.'

There was one extremely good thing about this woman: she did not waste a single word. She would make an excellent witness; one could not imagine her prevaricating or hedging, still less being at a loss.

'Does she have much correspondence?' Roger enquired.

'A cousin sends an occasional postcard from Miami Beach, in Florida. That is all.'

'May I see her?' asked Roger.

For the first time, Dr. Courtways hesitated, but only for a fraction of a second.

'Did you see her at the previous enquiry?'

'No. Other officers were concerned.'

'Do you need to tell her you are a policeman?'

'No.'

'Do you wish her to know you have come especially to see her?'

'Not necessarily. I would just like to see her,' Roger explained, 'simply so that I can have a clear picture in my mind of everyone involved in the case, if it should ever develop.'

'Very well,' said Dr. Courtways. 'Tea is usually served in the drawing-room between three-thirty and four-thirty, and we often have guests who are going to send patients here I shall simply introduce you as Mr West, and you will only meet Lady Marshall incidentally. But any clarity of picture in your mind, Superintendent, will be a superficial one only. I'm sure you understand that.'

'Perfectly,' Roger said.

'Then let us go.' Dr. Courtways stood up from the chair behind her scrupulously tidy desk, and led the way into the high ceilinged hall, the panelled walls lined with heavy oil portraits, the polished floors covered with intricately patterned Persian rugs. A maid in cap and apron was coming out of a doorway, carrying an empty

tea tray; as women often did, she shot a quick glance at Roger. Then he was taken into the drawing-room. It was elegantly furnished in pale, expensive colours, but the most striking feature was a long, leaded window, overlooking sweeping lawns which went down to the river, perhaps a hundred yards away.

In the room, two foursomes were sitting at card-tables, one playing bridge, one whist. On a big, roomy couch, a middle-aged man leaned back against the cushions. Sitting together in a corner of the room were two women and one man, and as Roger glanced their way the man said something which made both women laugh delightedly.

Dr. Courtways led the way towards the trio, and Roger wondered which woman was Lady Marshall He recognised neither. They chatted, apparently normally, for a few minutes, and then Roger was taken to the bridge party, which had now broken up. There were the usual inquest comments on the game; all seemed sensible —this might be on board a luxury ship, thought Roger, or in the drawing-room of any private house during a house party.

'Mrs. Lidbetter, may I introduce Mr. West . . . Lady Marshall, Mr Brash, Colonel Hull . . .'

Lady Marshall was, as he remembered her, tall and fair, with deep violet eyes; she was simply dressed, in a pale green linen suit with a single string of pearls at her neck. Her blonde hair was beautifully coiffured, and she was a strikingly attractive woman.

'Have you a friend coming to join us, Mr. West?' she asked, not recognising him at all. 'Or are you yet another official sent discreetly by the Home Office to make sure that we are all being properly cared for?'

Colonel Hull choked back a laugh.

'*Really*, Yolande,' protested Mrs. Lidbetter, who was

willowy, youthful, sharp-featured—and at this moment, sharp-voiced.

Roger smiled.

'I'm an official from the Home Office, of course.'

'Don't believe it for a moment,' said Colonel Hull. 'Not for a moment.' He was short, fresh-faced, alert, with a very slight squint.

'But *I* do.' The man named Brash spoke for the first time, but he had been staring at Roger intently. 'You're Superintendent Roger West of Scotland Yard, aren't you? Which of us has qualified for *your* interest, Mr. West?'

. . .

Roger held his smile, but it became set. He tried desperately to think of a good, quick answer but could not, and he was about to admit his identity when two things happened simultaneously.

'There is a continuing interest in the Hubble estate, Mr. Brash, as you know well,' said Dr. Courtways.

'*Got you, by God! Got you!*' bellowed Colonel Hull. He threw back his head and roared with laughter; it was almost possible to imagine a maniacal note in the sound. The man on the couch jumped up and began to walk about, talking to himself; as he drew nearer, Roger heard him quoting:

'*The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children until the third and fourth generation. What did my forebears do? The sins of the fathers . . .*'

'So you're still on about the Hubble case,' said Mr. Brash; he had not looked away from Roger for a moment. 'Twenty million pounds and no one sure enough to know what to do with it. What are you trying to prove? The State's right to a private fortune? Doesn't this infernal government take *enough* away from us?

Here am I, certified insane, but my lawyers still have to pay surtax on my behalf. Infamous. Don't you agree?'

'You know that Mr West isn't allowed to discuss politics, being a policeman,' Dr. Courtways remarked.

'You don't have to be a politician to know *this* government's no good,' said Brash, acidly.

'Surely you're permitted to have your opinions,' said Lady Marshall. Her lips curved back over small, pointed teeth, and Roger had the impression of a cat waiting to pounce.

'Oh, yes, I've opinions,' Roger said. 'I find it wiser not to talk about them, though.' Then he ventured: 'I'm never sure that I want to talk politics with a beautiful woman.'

'My, my! The gallant detective!' But the glow in the violet eyes showed that she was pleased. 'Why *do* men always assume that attractive women have no mind. Except on one particular subject, *my* mind is perfectly sound.'

'Dr. Courtways,' said Mrs. Lidbetter, unexpectedly, 'I think you'd better take Mr. West away before we feel we want to keep him with us.'

Roger laughed.

They all laughed, Colonel Hull quite naturally this time.

But when he was sitting at the wheel of his car outside the beautiful house, Roger did not feel at all like laughing It was several years since he had come in contact with the problem which Dr. Courtways was trying to cope with, but he remembered how normal so many unbalanced people were It was hard to believe that a woman so rational and so attractive as Lady Marshall, *could* be insane.

Yet he knew that she was.

What had gone on inside Sir David's mind when, after marrying a woman of such beauty, he had discovered the truth about her?

And how quick-witted Dr. Doris Courtways had proved to be. The Hubble case had been going on and on for twenty-five years, and made a perfectly valid excuse for him to be visiting the nursing home.

He was not back at the Yard until after six o'clock

On his desk was a recorded telephone message from Chelsea Division. It said simply:

Sir David Marshall flying Wednesday morning to New York en route to Miami.

'Miami!' Roger exclaimed aloud.

. . .

He got the file out again, studied it, and left it on his desk for action the following day. He spent the evening at home, watching television, but deeply preoccupied.

The next morning he checked with Dr. Courtways that there had been no further anonymous letters, then sent the original with the envelope for examination for prints, infra-red photography and close scrutiny by a hand-writing expert.

Next, he confirmed that Marshall was, in fact, going to Miami, that Ward had already gone on business to Milan, and that Henrietta Lyle still lived in a small flat of her own, and led, as far as anyone could judge, an exemplary life. Feeling uneasy about Marshall's sudden decision to fly to Miami, he telephoned a friend in the Commonwealth Relations Office and asked what work Marshall was doing.

'He's studying some documents which seem to imply that two newly-emergent Commonwealth nations are planning a coup against each other,' he was told. 'One seems to be receiving Russian aid, the other American. If the documents were made public it could cause a lot of

trouble—and possibly lead to civil war in one of the emergent nations.'

'I'd like to know what he takes with him,' Roger told himself, and he telephoned the London Airport Police, who in turn had a word with Customs; an excuse would be found to go through Marshall's baggage very carefully before he took off.

But in spite of all these things, Roger felt that it was an inconclusive, unsatisfactory day.

. . .

Henrietta Lyle did not leave Number 5 until nearly ten o'clock that night. She had worked through the evening with only a brief break for a light supper, and David had concentrated continuously on the work he was doing. As she drove off she saw him at the window, a hand raised. The light was behind him and she could not really see his face. She realised with a sharp pang that it would be three weeks at least before she saw him again, and as his plane left at nine-thirty the following morning there would be little time for talking. Only once or twice had he touched, and then lightly, on the relationship between them, and she felt almost disturbed. Then she laughed at herself. He was forcing himself to behave exactly as she wanted him to and she still wasn't satisfied!

He was looking very tired.

The holiday would do him good.

She reached her apartment. It seemed very bare tonight, and very ordinary, cold, not so much in temperature as in atmosphere. Oh, she was absurd! But to lose both David and Gerry at the same time *was* a bit hard. She did her usual chores and turned on the television for the late news, but had hardly settled down to watch it when the telephone rang.

'David,' she thought, and stretched a hand for the receiver.

'Hallo?'

'Can Miss Henrietta Lyle take a personal call from Milan, Italy, please?'

'Milan!' exclaimed Henrietta; then added quickly: 'Yes. This is she.'

I can't be difficult with Gerry *now*, she told herself. She had thought hardly at all about him during the day, there had been so little time, but now the method of their parting came back vividly. The one certain thing about Gerry was that he never gave up. Someone obviously not English was speaking, then, suddenly, she heard Gerry's voice.

'Hallo, Hetty!'

'*Gerry!* How lovely. But you *shouldn't* have called from Italy!'

'To be sure I was forgiven I'd have called from Timbuctoo,' he told her. 'And to be sure you can't have an absolutely uninterrupted spell with that boss of yours, I shall call you at least once a day! Seriously, I hated myself last night.'

'No more than *I* hated you for a few minutes,' Henrietta admitted, half-laughingly. 'But don't telephone, there's no need—David's going to Miami to visit his cousin —and to have a few weeks rest.'

'You mean you're there alone?' cried Gerry. 'And to think I've chosen these two weeks to be away!' After a moment's pause, he added: 'I wonder what he's up to? There's some dark motive behind—no! Hetty, don't ring off, please don't ring off!'

'But Gerry, it's so *expensive*. It'll cost you a fortune.'

'Worth every penny,' said Gerry firmly. His voice was so clear, he might have been in the next room. He made no further mention of David, but spoke amusingly of the flight to Milan, his fellow passengers, his hotel. Yet when

at last she did put down the receiver the phrase which lingered on her mind was: 'I wonder what he's up to? There's some dark motive behind——'

It was nonsense, of course

Wasn't it?

11

THE MURDER

THE next morning Roger got up in a mood which he did not understand, for there was no reason for it He had a sense of dissatisfaction with himself, with his sons, and with Janet. The others were quick to notice it.

'Case going sour on you, Dad?' asked Martin-called-Scoop at breakfast.

Roger glowered at him.

'Jolly nice morning!' exclaimed Richard-called-Fish, brightly. 'Just the morning for a flip in a Tiger Moth—if only I had the money for a Tiger Moth!'

'Think yourself lucky you can afford to have flying lessons,' said Roger tartly.

'Or unlucky,' said Janet, pouring out coffee. 'Why on earth you ever gave him permission to fly I'll never know. Every time he goes up I worry in case he never comes down.'

'That's one thing you *can* be sure of,' said Martin, straight-faced. 'If he goes up, he'll come down all right.'

Janet caught her breath, but before Roger could comment, Scoop said contritely:

'Sorry, Mum. Only a joke.'

Roger studied them while eating. Martin, not tall but broad-shouldered, and handsome despite a nose broken boxing in his schooldays, always seemed happy with life; but nothing ever went really right for him, and Roger knew that inwardly he was seriously troubled. Richard, the livelier of the two, was in some ways doing better than was good for him. Roger saw the anxious way in

which Janet looked at them both. He ought, soon, to make time to discuss Martin's future with the boy, but in his present mood he would probably do more harm than good. Then he saw Janet looking at him, pointedly, and that exasperated him, chiefly because he felt at fault.

'What are you doing this evening, Scoop?' he asked.

'Night-classes and girl-friend,' his son answered promptly.

'Which is easier to cut?'

'Night-classes!' said Martin mischievously. 'But why do you want to know?'

'Your father wants a talk with you,' Janet said severely.

'The one you warned me would be bound to come some day?' asked Martin, just a little more sarcastically than Roger liked.

'You've a lot of things coming to you one day,' he said drily. 'Tonight, nine-thirty, here—without girl-friend, Scoop.'

'Right, Dad,' said Martin, a hint of contrition in his [illegible]

'Anything you can do for me at the same time?' enquired Richard airily. He did not mean it rudely, Roger knew; the boy was always anxious to help Martin to fight his battles, and no doubt he could see a battle of sorts forthcoming.

'No thanks,' said Roger. 'I'll deal with you separately.' He glanced at the clock in the rather old-fashioned, shabby kitchen. 'Hey, I must be off!' He half-wished Janet would not follow him into the hall, but she did, as always. He took his hat off a peg on the hallstand, and said lightly: 'Keep reminding me—I'd hate to be late tonight.'

'I'd hate you to be, too,' said Janet. 'So would Scoop, Roger.'

'Hm-hm.' He was on edge to get off.

'*Are* you worried?'

'Er—no. No. Do I seem to be?'

'Much more than usual,' she told him. 'Preoccupied might be the better word.' She put her face forward for a kiss. 'Is anything going to stop us from getting away?'

'Oh, I don't think so for a minute!'

'Because if it is, don't worry,' Janet said. 'I'd rather not have a holiday this year than feel you had to leave a case that mattered to you.'

On that instant, Roger's mood changed completely. Putting an affectionate arm round her shoulders, he held her for a moment, as if reluctant to let her go.

'And when you're reminding me about Scoop and nine-thirty, remind me how lucky I am,' he said.

She was waving from the door when he drove off.

In an unbelievably happier mood he drove through the thick of the morning traffic along Kings Road and then through Victoria, reached the Yard a little after half-past nine, and was humming to himself as he walked along to his office. There was no new job for him, simply old ones to check over, and by ten o'clock he had finished another skimming of the Marshall case. Nothing useful had been found on the anonymous letter, no further information had come in from the Commonwealth Office Marshall had caught his plane, but no report had come in from Customs; had there been anything in his luggage open to suspicion, he would surely have been stopped. This time Roger took a much closer look at a photograph of Lady Marshall; compared with the real woman it looked flat and almost dull. It was those unusual violet eyes that gave such life to her face, he thought.

Making a conscious effort, he began to check the details of a diamond robbery case for the Old Bailey, the next moment his telephone rang.

He lifted the receiver. 'West speaking.'

'Come and see me *at once*.' It was Coppell, and the

Commander's tone suggested he was in the worst of possible moods. 'And get a team ready—you've got to go out to Richmond pretty damned quick. Lady Marshall's been murdered.'

. . .

Roger sat at his desk, absolutely unmoving, for perhaps sixty seconds. Then, slowly, the self-discipline of the policeman asserted itself. Richmond: he must talk to the Superintendent in charge, Jim Callen. They would have the essential facilities at the Division, but for this he needed Yard experts, those men with just that little something which made them outstanding. Wilderson, for fingerprints, Larson for photograph, Sloan for general investigation. He'd better telephone Sloan straight away.

Sloan, still at Chief Inspector's rank, had a desk in an office occupied by four other C.I.'s. Would he be there? wondered Roger.

'Sloan here,' came a voice, a few seconds later.

'Bill,' said Roger. 'I want Wilderson, Larson, and you ready for Richmond in fifteen minutes, with the best second men for each one of the team you can get.'

'Right, sir.'

'Who do you know at Richmond?'

'Montmorency,' said Sloan.

'Talk to him, tell him we're coming over about the death of Lady Marshall.'

'My God!' exclaimed Sloan

'Tell him I'll talk to Superintendent Callen as soon as I'm through with the Commander.'

'Right.'

As Roger replaced the receiver, the telephone bell rang again

'Hallo, Handsome—remember me?' a man said.

'I might if I knew who you were,' Roger said, trying not to sound impatient.

'Jim Johnson, of the London Airport Police. But I can tell you're in a hurry,' Johnson went on in a different tone. 'Sir David Marshall's baggage was all clear.'

'Did you see him yourself?' asked Roger.

'I stood by.'

'What did he seem like?'

'Battered, but normal enough,' Johnson told him.

'Thanks a lot,' said Roger appreciatively. 'I'll be out to see you soon.'

Once again the telephone bell rang as soon as he replaced the receiver. This time, not surprisingly, it was Coppell.

'When the hell are you coming?' he rasped.

'I'm on my way, sir.'

Coppell thumped the receiver down. Roger went straight out of the office and banged into another Superintendent, who promptly buttonholed him.

'Hi, Handsome Heard the latest about Wilson?'

'If I wait for it you'll have heard the latest about me,' said Roger, and freed himself.

When at last he was at the door of Coppell's office, and tapped, he heard Coppell's voice but no summons. He opened the door. Coppell, speaking on the telephone, waved him in without pausing in what he was saying.

'Well, we can't work miracles ... Yes, West's in charge ... No, I can't handle it myself, sir, and he knows more about the case than anybody ... Yes, sir, right away.'

Coppell rang off.

'Does Marshall know?' he demanded.

'I haven't enquired yet.' Roger paused, then added flatly: 'He's on his way to America, by air.'

'Why the hell wasn't I informed?' exclaimed Coppell.

'It was in my written report, sir,' Roger said mildly.

Coppell grunted.

'Find out if his secretary knows anything.' He picked up the telephone again. 'Get me Sir David Marshall, Number 5 . . . What's the name of that Street, West?'

'Glebe Crescent.'

'Glebe Crescent, Chelsea . . . Tell anyone who answers that Superintendent West wants him.' He banged down the receiver 'That was the Assistant Commissioner—he wants action. You'll be in the dog house if you don't solve this one without wasting time. I——'

'I don't waste time,' Roger said quietly. 'And I won't get results any quicker if the V.I.P.'s are breathing down my neck. I've been in touch with London Airport—had Customs look over Marshall's baggage in case he was taking any confidential documents with him. Johnson of the Airport said there was nothing.'

'They won't want to know how bright you are,' grunted Coppell, 'they'll want the killer.'

Roger ignored this. 'Do the Press know, yet?' he asked.

'Not as far as I know, and the Courtways woman promised she wouldn't say anything until we get out there. I'd better——' Coppell broke off as his telephone rang, picked up the receiver, then banged it down again. 'No answer from Marshall's place. That Lyle girl hasn't gone off, too, has she?'

'Not as far as I know. I'll have her checked and the house watched. Anything else for me now?'

'Get cracking,' Coppell ordered.

'I've got Sloan, Wilderson, and Larson on the move,' Roger said Shall we manage with the Richmond Police Surgeon, or take one of our top men?'

'I'll have Quinn standing by,' said Coppell.

. . .

Roger sat in the back of his car with Sloan at his side, and Larson, the Yard's photographic expert, in the seat next to a plainclothes man at the wheel. There wasn't much to say because little more was known. He had learned that Dr. Courtways had telephoned the Yard and been put through to the Commander; she had first asked for West, but he had been engaged.

'Wouldn't have made any difference,' Roger said to Sloan. 'The plane left an hour before we heard about it.'

'Do we know how she died?' asked Larson. 'Not one of these chopper jobs, I hope.'

'Strangled, according to Richmond' Roger had talked to Superintendent Callen, just before leaving, and they were going straight to the nursing home, where Callen would meet them.

'Any special angle to follow?' asked Sloan. He was a big, fresh-faced, schoolboyish-looking man who was now running to fat, which made him less wholesome-looking than he had been when he and Roger had first worked together. Weight, marriage, and possibly disappointment had slowed him down in more ways than one. He had resigned himself to being a top-flight second-in-command, and if he were ever moved up to Superintendency it would be towards the end of his career, and because of seniority. He could carry out orders, but somehow could not make decisions quickly enough to ensure his promotion.

'It's going to be tricky,' Roger told him. 'Particularly if we run into any of the patients Dr. Courtways may prevent it, but it may not be possible.' He related what had happened only two afternoons before, and an uneasy silence followed.

Traffic was very thick. It would be twelve o'clock before they reached the place, but it was no use worrying, Roger told himself and then glared out of the window, because he *was* worrying.

Those violet eyes——

Could it be argued that Yolande Marshall was better off dead?

Roger pushed the thought aside. It wasn't relevant. What mattered was who had killed her and why, and whether Sir David Marshall could possibly know anything about it He had already started enquiries, through the Yard's legal department, to find out who would benefit from Lady Marshall's death.

Her husband, presumably; perhaps also the cousin in Miami.

And one other person; a person who would benefit enormously because Marshall was now free to marry her.

Henrietta Lyle.

12

CAUSE FOR ANXIETY

HENRIETTA watched the huge jet aircraft take off, saw the streamers of dark fumes behind each engine, and waited on the observation roof of the airport until the machine had become only a speck in the sky. All the time she had been watching she had been aware of the roar of other aircraft landing and taking off, of voices over the public address system, of movement in the crowd below, the constant bustle as aircraft were reloaded and provisioned and made ready for new journeys to new lands and new peoples.

At last she turned and walked away.

David had telephoned her early that morning, and asked her to come with him to the airport, and she had scurried to get ready and be on time. But she had hated the actual moments of parting, and had told David that she wouldn't wait. They had said goodbye in the main lounge, long before he had boarded the bus which had taken him to the aircraft. Perhaps she should have gone home then. She wasn't used to this strange, empty feeling; now, she could almost understand what he meant when he told her how he felt when she left him.

She walked with forced briskness back to the big multiple-storey car park. He had driven here in his car, she was to drive it back. It was much larger than hers, and she was still a little awkward. A young B.O.A.C. officer, watching, grinned across at her.

'Shall I drive?' he called.

In spite of herself, she laughed; it was the kind of thing Gerry would say. She waved, and he waved back.

Two young men thumbed for a lift, but she shook her head. In these days it wasn't safe to stop for anyone, she told herself—feeling, nevertheless, a pang of contrition as she passed them—but the next moment they were forgotten, as thoughts of David flooded back to her mind It would be strange not to see him for so long, but the time would soon pass, she must concentrate on what she had to do. Despite convincing herself that she felt much better she was glum for most of the drive, and when she put the car in the garage and locked the garage doors, she felt almost sorry for herself But Miss Toms, the 'daily' who was more than a daily, tall, gangling, raw-boned and with very prominent eyes, called to her from the kitchen.

'Got him off safely, then?'

'Yes—he's the better part of a thousand miles away by now.'

'I never did trust those aircraft,' declared Miss Toms. 'I had a boy-friend who was a pilot once, always late, he was. Going to be in for lunch?'

'Yes—can you get me a snack?'

'I'll leave a tray,' promised Miss Toms.

Henrietta passed the open kitchen door and was almost at the door of her room when the other called out in a tone of alarm:

'Hey! I nearly forgot!'

Sugar, tea, coffee, milk, meat, bread—Miss Toms nearly forgot something every day.

'What's that?' called Henrietta, over her shoulder.

'I meant to leave a note on your desk,' said Miss Toms, striding behind her. 'My hands were wet, that's why I didn't. A policeman called.'

Henrietta spun round on her heel.

'*What?*'

'Said he wanted Sir David and the next best thing would be you.'

'Did he say what he wanted?' asked Henrietta, annoyed that the police were making such a fuss, and fearful that the caller had said enough to let Miss Tom put two-and-two together

'No—but would you call him back.'

'Was his name West?'

'No, but he said he was speaking *for* a man named West.'

'What name am I to ask for?' enquired Henrietta.

'Tomlinson—Detective-Sergeant Tomlinson. That's not a name *I'm* likely to forget,' declared Miss Toms, delighted with herself.

Henrietta glanced at the clock; it was a quarter to twelve, she had been an hour getting back from the airport. Better get the call over. She sat at her desk and dialled, asked for Tomlinson, and was put through almost at once.

'Tomlinson here.'

'I understand you asked me to call you,' said Henrietta. 'This is Henrietta Lyle.'

'Henrietta?—*oh!* Miss Lyle?'

'Yes.'

'Where are you speaking from?' the man asked.

'Sir David Marshall's home,' said Henrietta, a little puzzled by his tone of voice. 'Is it about ——?'

'Is one of our men there, Miss Lyle?'

'A man from Scotland Yard? No. Why should there be?'

'He's late, then,' said Tomlinson. 'I'm sorry to be so mysterious, but will you please wait until he comes and say nothing to anyone else before you talk to him. He'll be a Detective-Sergeant Cousins.'

'Will you *please* tell me what this is all about?' demanded Henrietta, and, as she spoke, heard a ring at the front door bell. 'Someone is here now,' she said. 'It may be your Mr. Cousins.'

'I'd be most grateful if you'll check,' said Tomlinson.

There were footsteps in the hall—Miss Toms, making sure she was at the door first. Puzzled, and aware that there must be something more than she yet knew, Henrietta said: 'Yes, hold on,' and stood up. As she did so, a shattering thought struck her: *David's plane might have crashed.* 'Oh, my God, no!' she exclaimed.

She realised that the colour had drained from her face as she opened the door. Miss Toms was admitting an unexpectedly elderly, grey-haired man. Henrietta had an impression of a lined face and of piercing slate-blue eyes.

She made herself speak evenly.

'Are you Detective-Sergeant Cousins?'

'Yes, Miss. Are you Miss Henrietta Lyle?'

'Yes. What has happened?'

He looked at her squarely, and Miss Toms gaped, scenting excitement if not scandal. Henrietta clenched her hands with impatience.

'What would you think might have happened, Miss?'

'Anything!' she exclaimed. 'A Mr. Tomlinson from the Yard is on the telephone, now you—*has the aircraft crashed?*' She could not keep the anguish out of her voice.

'Lord save us!' gasped Miss Toms.

'Aircraft——' Cousins began, then broke off hastily. 'No, miss, that's not why I'm here. No aircraft's crashed that I know of. I'll be glad if you will spare me a few minutes.'

'Certainly.' Henrietta forced a smile, and led him through to her office. Cousins, moving very quickly for a heavy man who must be nearly sixty, went across to her desk. 'May I, Miss Lyle? .. Thank you.' He picked up the telephone:

'That you, Tommy ... Yes ... I shouldn't think so ... Yes, of course.'

He rang off and turned to face Henrietta, and she

sensed that he was watching her very closely indeed, that he was going to try to catch her off guard.

'How long have you known about Lady Marshall's death?' He made the question into an accusation.

Angered by his manner and worried by the uncertainty, Henrietta heard the words but did not immediately take in their meaning. It was the way he looked at her searchingly, that really brought the significance of the question home. And as it dawned, so her expression changed, surprise, disbelief, horror, following one another across her face.

'*Dead!* But she *can't* be dead,' she said at last.

'I'm afraid she is, miss.' Cousins' voice was flat, unemotional.

'But –but—David—Sir David—would have heard about it!'

'Hadn't he?'

'Of course he hadn't. Almost the last thing he told me to do was telephone Dr Courtways regularly and enquire——' She broke off

'Was it indeed,' said Cousins slowly.

'Please tell me why you're here?' Henrietta spoke fearfully. 'What has it to do with the police, even if Lady Marshall *is* dead?'

'She was murdered, miss. Strangled. They found her this morning.' Cousins might have been talking about the weather.

Henrietta caught her breath. Yolande—*murdered*!

But people one *knew* were never murdered. Only strangers, people one read about in the newspapers. *Yolande*. It was impossible.

As the thoughts raced through her mind, uncontrolled, once again she had a strange feeling that this man was trying to catch her off guard. But why should he? she wondered. Surely—*surely* he couldn't suspect that she, Henrietta . . . That David . . .

It was monstrous.

It was more than she could stand.

'I'll be glad to help in any way I can, but I think I had better talk to Superintendent West . . .' Her voice sounded hollowly in her ears, her knees trembled. In a few moments she would begin to cry. Biting her lip, she led the way back to the hall.

Cousins, following her, did not ask any more questions. When he had gone, however, there were two uniformed policemen outside, one at the front door, one at the front gate.

Back in her office, she sat down at her desk, shivering. Making herself lift the telephone, she called Dr. Courtways, but the doctor was not available. She tried three times, then forced herself to start typing some letters which David had been anxious to have posted today; but she had no sooner put the paper in the machine than there was a tap on the door, and in came Miss Toms.

Two gentlemen had called from the *Daily Globe*, said Miss Toms, could Miss Lyle spare them a few minutes?

Henrietta shook her head, bending pointedly over the letters, and Miss Toms turned reluctantly away

The next moment the telephone rang. Henrietta snatched up the receiver—could this be Dr. Courtways?

'*Evening News* here, miss. I wonder——'

'I'm sorry.' Henrietta depressed the receiver rest, waited for the dialling tone, then tried for the fourth time to get Dr. Courtways, but still without success.

The moment she replaced the receiver, the telephone rang again. It was another reporter.

'I'm sorry.' Wearily, Henrietta replaced the receiver, and, on the instant, the bell rang yet again.

This time, it was Superintendent Roger West.

. . .

The most vivid moment of Roger's day, one which would stay in his mind for a very long time, was when he saw Lady Marshall lying back in bed, her head on one side, her beautiful violet eyes closed, her mouth slack.

Dr. Courtways related the story quietly and without emotion. It was normal, she told Roger, for patients to sleep as long as they wished. Lady Marshall had not called for her tea by ten o'clock, this had been reported, and a nurse had gone to check.

'I was told at once, Superintendent, and immediately tried to speak to you. When you weren't available I asked for Mr. Coppell.'

'I'm glad you did,' Roger said 'You understand that everyone will have to be questioned, unless we get results very quickly?'

'You mean the patients?' Dr. Courtways looked questioningly at Roger, and he nodded. 'Yes. Yes, of course. Any one of them is *capable* of committing the crime, Mr. West——' she was talking a shade too quickly, her only outward show of nervous tension, 'I can only pray that none of them actually did so.'

'What chances are there of anyone breaking in?' Roger demanded.

Dr. Courtways frowned. 'Our main purpose is to make sure that none of the patients can break *out*,' she said. 'I'm afraid that that may well answer your question. Oh, well——' she shrugged, 'I have arranged for the Secretary—in fact for all the staff—to be entirely at your disposal And there is a room on the ground floor, with a telephone, for your exclusive use.'

The rest of the day, Roger, and the members of his team, checked, questioned, took photographs, and tested everything in the room for fingerprints. The night staff was brought in and questioned, four of them in all.

None reported anything unusual.

None of the patients appeared to have left their rooms.

The front door was always locked and bolted; the back and two side doors also, but as all the patients were on the first floor, a night nurse in constant attendance, there was always a tendency to be careless with downstairs windows.

'So someone could have broken in,' Roger said. He was nagged by the fact that Marshall had flown to Miami on that very morning.

He talked to the local Police Surgeon and to Jack Quinn, the consultant pathologist at the Yard. Both agreed that a stocking had been slipped beneath Lady Marshall's head, and drawn tightly round her neck until she was dead.

'But why didn't she cry out?—make some attempt to fend off her attacker?' Roger asked. 'The night staff had heard nothing and there had been no signs of a struggle.'

'She was very heavily drugged,' Quinn told him, 'the normal practice, apparently. She would have been unaware of what was happening.'

Someone had crept into that room, taken the stocking, wound it round Lady Marshall's throat—and drawn it tighter and tighter.

'Could a woman have done it?' Roger knew the answer before he put the question.

'Of course.'

It had been half-past three in the afternoon when Detective-Sergeant Cousins had arrived at Richmond It was nearly half-past four when he reported back to Roger at the nursing home. The moment Roger saw him, he sensed excitement.

'Let's have the big stuff first,' Roger ordered.

They were in the room which had been put at his disposal, one which faced a hedge on one side of the grounds. In the past few hours Roger had interviewed at

least twenty people here and would probably interview as many more before the day was out.

'It could be big stuff, at that, sir. Sir David Marshall went out in his car at five minutes to twelve last night and returned a little after two o'clock this morning. The neighbour who reported the incident between him and Gerald Ward, saw him leave and return. He could easily have gone to Richmond and back in that time, sir.'

13

A MASS OF EVIDENCE

ROGER watched the other man's face, saw the depth of his satisfaction, and did the one thing which told him how seriously he took this news He lifted the telephone and dialled the Yard, asking as he did so:

'Found any corroborative evidence yet?'

'Two men on the beat saw a dark-coloured Rover 2000 which could have been Marshall's, heading towards Putney.'

'The right direction. Mr. Coppell, please . . . West.' He held on. 'What else?'

'I had a talk with Miss Lyle, sir. Incidentally, she thinks——'

Cousins broke off a fraction of a second before Coppell spoke into the telephone, and Roger sensed that he had bitten his tongue to keep back what he intended to say. Then Coppell said:

'Well, Handsome?'

'Marshall is known to have gone out between twelve and two in the morning,' Roger told him. 'Can you get all the Divisions *en route* to check, sir?' That would be Chelsea, Fulham, Putney, and Richmond. 'They'll jump to it quicker for you than for me.'

'I'll fix it,' said Coppell. 'Anything else?'

Enough was never enough.

'If I had to go on what I've seen at Richmond, I'd say it was an inside job.'

'*Couldn't* Marshall—or anyone else—have got in?'

'They could,' answered Roger. 'But there's no evidence yet that they did. I've questioned all the staff, and

asked Richmond to check closer. The big worry they feel at the home is that it could have been a patient—but if it was, then one of the night staff slipped up.'

'What would that tell us?' demanded Coppell.

'If a patient opens a door it gives a signal, and no signal was noticed or reported. There's one other thing, sir.'

'Yes?'

'Motive.'

'Marshall's motive is a quarter of a million pounds,' said Coppell flatly.

'Willed to him, sir?'

'Yes. There are two other relatives, but they don't get enough to make it worth killing. This cousin—Chloe Renati—in Florida gets five thousand pounds, and her daughter gets one thousand. The only other bequests are to charities.'

'I see, sir.'

'And don't forget the Lyle girl,' said Coppell.

He rang off without another word, and Roger put down his receiver, looked up at Cousins, and asked:

'What, incidentally, *does* Miss Lyle think?'

'She thinks she had better talk to you, sir.'

Roger frowned. 'H'mm. What impression did you get of her?'

'If she isn't involved, sir, a pretty good secretary!'

'Well, she *is* involved. Anything to suggest a plot between her and Marshall?'

'Well, sir——' Cousins paused. 'There was one thing that made me think twice. When I first got there she was very much on edge. She appeared to be afraid my arrival meant that Sir David's aircraft had crashed—but that may have been to gain time to stall me. Nothing strong enough to put into evidence though, sir.'

'But you thought she had plenty on her mind?'

'As she would have if she knew what Marshall had—

sorry, sir! —if she had *reason to believe* that Marshall had killed his wife.' Cousins hesitated, then added: 'One thing's certain, sir, if she *is* Marshall's mistress, they hide it very well. The neighbour who saw him go out seems to spend her entire life at the window, and if Henrietta Lyle ever stayed the night there, I'm pretty sure she'd have spotted it.'

'Good point,' said Roger. 'Well, she did spot Marshall's excursion in the small hours.' He pressed a bell, and Sloan came in. 'Bill, take down all the pertinent points of Cousin's story, then you'll be up to date If you need me for anything urgently you'll get me at Marshall's place.'

'Right, sir!'

Roger went out. His car, together with the other police-cars, was parked at one side of the nursing home, so as to be as unostentatious as possible. Despite this precaution, however, half-a-dozen newspapermen converged on him the moment he appeared.

'Anything new, Superintendent?'

'Any arrest?'

'*Is* it true that Sir David Marshall has fled the country?'

'To *Miami*,' a man called incredulously.

'Nothing new, no arrest, nothing to say,' said Roger. He paused long enough for two photographers to take pictures, then got into his car.

'To the Yard, sir?' asked his driver.

The newspapermen were within earshot.

'Yes,' said Roger.

As the car turned out of a side entrance, a crowd of a hundred or so people surged forward, mostly elderly men and middle-aged women, but a few couples with young children. The appeal of a murder case to so many people never failed to disgust Roger. He sat back to concentrate, ignoring the craning heads, he redirected his

driver to Glebe Crescent, then called Sir David Marshall's number on his radio-telephone.

Henrietta Lyle answered, in her quite unmistakable voice.

'This is Sir David Marshall's residence.'

'This is Roger West, Miss Lyle,' Roger said. 'I'm on my way to see you. I'll be extremely grateful if you can wait until I arrive—I won't be more than an hour.'

'Then I'll certainly be here,' Henrietta Lyle promised.

Roger sat back and tried to concentrate. She had asked to speak to him, so it seemed likely that he might be able to persuade her to talk where Cousins had failed. The thought was hardly in his mind before the telephone rang in the car.

'West,' he said.

'Hold on, sir. Mr. Coppell would like to speak to you.'

Coppell was certainly behaving as if he were being pushed very hard indeed from above, thought Roger.

'West . . . I've two things,' Coppell announced without preamble. 'Marshall's car *was* seen at Putney Hill at ten-past one this morning —one of our patrol men saw him. He knows Marshall by sight. Second—can you search his home without a warrant?'

'Over his secretary's dead body, I imagine,' Roger said.

'Avoid a warrant if you can, but the A.C. will issue one in case you need it. Is that clear?'

'Perfectly clear,' said Roger. 'Any other news, sir?'

'Marshall's landed at New York and has been told about the murder—the only report so far says he took it very calmly.'

'Is he coming back?'

'If he doesn't,' said Coppell, 'then you'll have to go and get him.'

He sounded as if he meant exactly that.

. . .

Henrietta put down the telephone after speaking to Superintendent West, but did not immediately restart typing. Instead, she went to the kitchen to make herself some tea If West was to be here in about an hour, then she ought to get as many letters as she could signed and ready for the post by the time he arrived; she wasn't likely to feel like doing much more after he had gone She was standing looking out of the kitchen window, feeling oddly lonely and forlorn, when the telephone rang again.

'This is Sir David Marshall's residence.'

'Can Miss Henrietta Lyle take a personal call from New York,' the operator asked.

'*New York!*' she exclaimed.

'Sir David Marshall is calling her,' the operator went on.

'Yes.' Henrietta said, almost too tense to speak clearly. 'Yes, I *am* Miss Lyle.'

'The call will come through within the next ten minutes, please be as near the telephone as you can be until you've been connected.'

'Yes,' she said

'Please replace the receiver, we will call you back.'

Henrietta put down the receiver, ran back to the kitchen, poured out a cup of tea, and hurried into her room with it. Thank heavens the call hadn't come an hour later, when West would be here. David must have learned of Yolande's death.

Suddenly, she thought: 'He *will* have heard, won't he? I *can't* have to break the news to him.' Then, after absorbing the shock of that possibility. 'Oh, well, if I have to, I have to.'

As she finished her tea, the telephone rang. If this was one of the nuisance callers who had been on the line most of the day she would scream.

'This is—Henrietta Lyle.'

'One moment please—your call from New York.'

'Henrietta,' David said with hardly a pause, his deep voice very clear. 'I was afraid you might have gone out.'

'Oh, David!' she exclaimed.

'You—you've heard the news, of course?' he asked, quite calmly.

'Yes. David, I'm so very sorry. I can't tell you how sorry.'

'Henrietta——' David's voice took on an urgent note. 'There's something I particularly want you to do for me.'

'Anything!' she exclaimed.

'Listen very carefully. In the safe built into the floor of the study, beneath the carpet under my chair, there are some papers—envelopes—marked "Family". On no account do I want the police to find them.'

'But—but why should they——' she began.

'Henrietta, darling, don't be naive.' David spoke almost sharply. 'The police think I killed Yolande and flew out of the country to avoid being questioned. And it won't help to prove I'd made the flight plans *before* the murder; even if I *had* killed her, I'd have planned ahead. Have they searched the house yet?' Anxiety sounded in his voice.

'They certainly haven't!'

'It's no use trying to stop them, and they're bound to want to, soon. Get those envelopes, and bring them out to me, in Miami.'

'In *Miami*?' she echoed unbelievingly.

'Yes. Do exactly as I've done—fly to New York and wait at the airport until you can fly down to Miami. You have the address, The Royalty Hotel, Miami Beach.'

'But David——'

'It matters,' he said very simply.

'David, is it wise for *me* to bring them out to you? The police——'

'You don't mind taking the risk, do you?'

'Good heavens, *no*! But——'

David cut her short. 'Telephone Mr Jonathan Wise at the United States Consulate, tell him who you are, and say you need a visa urgently—he will short-cut the formalities. If he, or the police, want to know what the rush is about, tell them you are bringing some important papers which I forgot. If they want to know what papers, show them the unfinished manuscript I'm working on.'

'Yes. Yes, I'll do that. But David, won't they think it——' desperately, Henrietta strove for the right words, 'Won't they think it *odd* if you don't come back? For the funeral and everything,' she added uncomfortably.

'They may,' said David. 'You probably do, too. But it's essential that I get those envelopes—essential that the police don't see them and impound them for examination.'

She almost cried: 'But *why*?'

Instead, she said: 'I'll manage somehow.'

'I know,' he said gruffly. 'Bless you, darling. I'll see you in Miami.'

He rang off, without another word—and as Henrietta put her receiver down she realised that Superintendent West was due here in half an-hour, that everything she did outside would be seen by the two policemen, that David had given her an almost impossible task. But even that was less important than the uncertainty which now flooded her mind.

Why was it so important that the police shouldn't see those documents?

And why wasn't David flying straight back to England?

14

SUSPICION GROWS

HENRIETTA had never felt as she did now: as if whatever she did, wherever she went, she were being watched. She walked to the study window and looked out. The two policemen were talking together, at the gate. Moving across the room to David's desk, she pushed his heavily upholstered chair to one side, then knelt down and folded the carpet back. So long as she remained kneeling, she was hidden from the window by a filing cabinet.

She had her keys in her hand.

When David had first given her a key to the safe she had thought it unwise. Now, heart beating rather fast, she unlocked the door which fitted flush with the floor, and pulled it up. She knew exactly what to expect inside: a metal box which could be lifted out, and which contained all his confidential documents and usually a little money. She lifted it and put it on the floor, the openings of the partitions facing her. Each was locked. The envelopes, presumably, would be in the largest compartment and she unlocked this first.

Yes—there they were: three envelopes, buff-coloured, strong sealed, each one marked: 'Personal And Family.' She put these on one side—then thought she heard a sound at the window. Her heart leaped, and she peered nervously over the top of the desk.

A sparrow was perched on the window, where it was open.

She lowered the metal box back into the safe, which was self-locking, put the carpet and chair back into posi-

tion, and picked up the envelopes. They were large and cumbersome and certainly not easy to conceal.

Was David right? *Would* the police want to search the house?

Why was it so important they didn't find the envelopes?

Why——?

She fought the questions aside, one after another. She had only twenty minutes left, possibly less, and if she went out carrying a parcel, then the policemen would see her, and West would almost certainly be told. She *must* find a hiding-place which he wouldn't suspect, a way of taking these out of the house with her.

With the post!

She remembered David saying: 'The safest way to send a parcel is with open ends—no one ever thinks it worth stealing!' She often posted books and papers for him, between stiff boards. Hurrying into her own room, she packed the envelopes and strung them round in her normal way. Then, hardly thinking now but acting automatically, she put a label in her typewriter and addressed it to a bookshop with which David did a lot of business Then she signed all the letters she had written, added a few which David had left for posting, and put them all in a pile on her desk. She had accomplished more than she had realised, the pile was quite large.

If West arrived 'within the hour' he would be here in five minutes. She went into the cloakroom, pinned up the loose ends of her hair, relipsticked, and then returned to her room. She felt calm enough, yet could not keep her eyes off the pile of post. At last she allowed her thoughts to run free.

'*Why* didn't David want these documents to be found by the police?' she asked herself.

'*Why* hadn't he taken the first flight back to England?'

'*Why had he run away?*'

A ring at the front door bell cut through the last question.

. . .

Roger heard the girl coming, quick, positive footsteps, in her way she was a very positive person. When she opened the door he was struck again by the brilliance of her blue eyes, and the pleasing regularity of her features; not truly a beauty, she was, in her thin-faced way, quite striking.

'Good afternoon, Miss Lyle.'

'Good afternoon,' she said. 'Do come in. Shall we talk in Sir David's study?'

She led the way, and once again he was impressed by this room, with its book-lined walls and antique furniture, its subdued colouring; it was a man's room, a scholar's room. 'Would you like to sit there?' she asked. She had decided in advance where to put him and he noticed with amusement that she placed him with the light from the window shining on his face while she sat with her back to the window. 'How can I help you, Mr. West?'

Was she being over-precise? Over-polite?

'In several ways,' Roger said. He hesitated, and then went on: 'We haven't yet discovered who murdered Lady Marshall.'

'It was—a terrible thing.'

'Yes. I find it terrible.' Roger was watching Henrietta's expression very closely. 'You understand, I'm sure, that we have to ask a great many questions and probe deeply before we get at the truth.'

She nodded.

'And that we need all possible co-operation.'

'Yes, of course.'

She appeared quite unflustered. Was she being a little

too clever? Roger wondered, or did he imagine it. He decided to bide his time.

'Have you heard from Sir David?' he asked.

'Yes—he telephoned only half-an-hour ago,' she replied unhesitatingly.

'From New York?' Roger realised that the question was superfluous, and went on hastily: 'When is he coming back?'

'He isn't.'

'He *isn't?*' Roger was unable to hide his surprise.

'No,' Henrietta Lyle insisted, and her voice became quite cold. 'I am sure that Sir David is the best judge of his own actions.'

'But my dear Miss Lyle, his wife was murdered in cold blood!'

'And I am sure he is greatly distressed.'

'Remaining in America, in these circumstances, hardly indicates that.'

She looked at him levelly.

'Rushing back to this country would only be pandering to public opinion, Mr. West. It wouldn't help Yolande.'

'But what about helping the police, Miss Lyle? It would make things a lot easier for us if he came back to England and answered our questions. And he was asked to return.'

Roger thought she showed some surprise at that, and went on quickly: 'Did he tell you *why* he wasn't coming back?'

'No,' she answered slowly. 'I *am* simply his secretary, Mr. West, and he doesn't always explain his reasons for any decisions he may make.'

'I suppose not,' Roger said, almost grudgingly. 'Are you in charge here during his absence?'

'Yes.'

'What about his housekeeper?'

'She comes in for two hours Mondays to Fridays,' Henrietta explained.

'I see. Well, I'm afraid I shall have to ask you certain questions, Miss Lyle, which would be better answered by Sir David.'

'I will answer as far as I can.'

'Thank you. Did he make arrangements for this visit to America this week or last?'

'Actual arrangements, this week. He has been thinking and talking of taking a holiday for some time, though.'

'Do you know why?'

'He's been overworking and badly needed one. He has a cousin in Miami, and decided to go and stay with her.'

Roger changed the trend of questions suddenly, to try to catch her unprepared.

'Have you any objection if we search this house, Miss Lyle?'

Henrietta looked astounded. '*Search!* Why on earth should you?'

'The police don't have to explain their reasons when they think a certain line of investigation is advisable,' Roger said drily.

Henrietta frowned. 'I have the strongest possible objections.'

'Why?'

Henrietta shifted her position in her chair, so that she sat upright with her hands clasped in her lap.

'The only possible justification would be if you suspected Sir David of Lady Marshall's murder. I cannot believe the police would be *quite* so ridiculous as that.'

'We have to take every possibility into account,' Roger replied, evenly.

'This is not even a possibility!'

'*Now* who is being ridiculous, Miss Lyle?'

Henrietta gave no indication that she was annoyed.

'I suppose we must agree that different things look ridiculous to different people, Mr. West.'

'Yes. Do you know whether Sir David has any plans to remarry?'

Henrietta looked up, startled.

'Good gracious, no!'

'Are you sure?'

'I am——' she began, then gave a rather forced laugh, the first artificial thing Roger had noticed. 'Now you *are* being ridiculous,' she said. 'He couldn't make plans for marrying again, being already married.'

'Come,' Roger protested. 'You can't be as naïve as that, Miss Lyle.'

He expected her to echo the word 'naïve?' in exasperation. Instead, after a considered pause, she said with every appearance of sincerity, as if she were examining the issue:

'I suppose I *am* naïve where such things are concerned. I do tend to take conventions literally. You mean that Sir David may have met someone else whom he would like to marry, and in order to be free, might have murdered his wife?'

Roger admired her directness, and was beginning to like the girl. As directly, he answered:

'Yes. *Do* you know if he was fond of someone else?'

Her eyes seemed to become more piercing, more blue, and certainly more beautiful. In a strange way she seemed to become more beautiful, too, to develop more character in her face, the more they talked. Roger had a feeling that she would always tell the truth, whatever the circumstances; then warned himself that he was crazy even to allow the thought to pass through his mind. She might well be a congenital liar.

'I know of only one person with whom he has discussed the possibility of marriage, if he were free—and that is *me*, Mr. West. There may well be others, I simply

don't know. I have never taken the suggestion very seriously.'

Roger looked at her searchingly.

'Are you stating that Sir David proposed marriage to you, and you rejected him?'

'I simply told him that as there wasn't any possibility of it, there was no point in discussing the question.' Henrietta leaned forward in her chair, as if about to get to her feet. 'As for searching the house, I've tried to think what Sir David would do if he were here, and I think he would agree. That is, if you're really serious.'

'I'm very serious.'

'Very well,' she said. 'When do you propose to start?'

'This evening—both start and finish,' Roger answered.

'Will you need me here all the time?'

'Won't you want to stay?'

'I suppose I should,' Henrietta said, reluctantly, 'but I must catch the post—I shall have to go to the main Post Office as it is—and I must have supper, and then I have to pack.'

'*Pack?*' echoed Roger, blankly.

'Yes,' she said. 'Sir David has asked me to join him in Miami. He left behind a very important manuscript which he wants me to take out to him.' She stood up quickly, as if the statement were quite unsensational, and went to the desk, picking up the post. 'I really *must* get these off, Mr. West, I'd quite forgotten.'

15

DOUBLE DECEPTION

'If he lets me go, the papers are safe,' Henrietta thought. She looked at West, the expression on her face one of transparent honesty. 'Oh God,' she thought, 'please let him let me go.'

. . .

'She's too good to be true,' Roger thought, getting to his feet. 'She's putting something across me. And she's very anxious to get off with those letters. Why?'

. . .

It seemed an age to Henrietta; she couldn't keep up the pretence much longer. At times she had actually enjoyed the cut and thrust, but now she was near screaming point. Would he let her go or wouldn't he? Had she been too casual about allowing the police to search? He seemed to be trying to read her thoughts.

Suddenly, he smiled. 'Yes, of course. But may I have a look at those first?'

Panic flared up within her and she was sure it showed in her eyes. She clutched the bundle of letters and the precious packet tightly for a moment, then told herself there was nothing she could do but let them go; she would have to try to look unconcerned, that was all. She held them towards him.

West took them. 'Thank you.' He passed them from one hand to the other, reading the name and address on

each, showing no interest—not even when he looked down at the packet. Thank heavens she had put that address label on! 'Thank you,' he said again, handing them back 'Will you come straight back here when you've posted them?'

'He's going to let me take them out,' she cried to herself, exulting inwardly. Aloud, and calmly, she said: 'Yes, if that will help.'

She turned away from him, praying that he could not read her exultation.

. . .

'She's got away with something,' Roger thought, 'and it's something to do with those letters.' He watched her carefully as she opened a drawer in the green-topped desk, and took out some stamps. Then he turned towards the door.

'I'll be back by the time you are,' he said, and went out.

The two uniformed policemen stood to attention. Roger's driver, chatting to them, moved smartly to the door of the car and opened it. But before getting inside, Roger beckoned to a plainclothes man who was standing close by.

'Hallo, Bob. Just the fellow I want; you must be psychic. Miss Lyle will be out in a minute, with nine letters and one packet—says she's taking them to the main Post Office. I want to know whether she does in fact go there, whether she posts everything, meets anyone else, the lot. Clear?'

'Nine letters and one packet—I'll see what I can do,' the plainclothes man promised.

. . .

Henrietta walked down the drive, and got into her car, easing it into the stream of traffic Soon she was pulling up outside the Post Office. Feeling almost fiercely excited, she tucked the packet under the mat of the car, and went inside with the letters.

. . .

Roger was halfway to the Yard when the plainclothes man called him, in his car

'She posted the letters, but she hadn't got a packet when she went into the Post Office,' he reported. 'She didn't meet or speak to anyone, though.'

. . .

Coppell was looking tired His pipe was out, and a heap of half smoked tobacco filled an ash-tray and gave off an offensive smell As Roger went in, he bent down and took a bottle of whisky and two glasses from a cupboard in his desk.

'I'll use you as an excuse,' he said 'What a bloody day If they offer you this job when I'm gone, don't take it. You'll get more grey hairs in a week than you would in your job in a year' He took out a soda syphon 'Say when.'

'When . . . thanks' Roger sat down, relieved by the other's mood.

'There's been one of those periodic "can't we cut down on expenses?" panics And at the same time the old man's being pushed, so *we're* being pushed, over the Marshall case.'

'Why are they making such a fuss?' Roger demanded.

'Things are very touchy between certain Commonwealth African States, and some of those reports'—Coppell waved towards a pile of papers on his desk—'are

pretty scathing about one or two of our ministers. Lots of talk about hand-outs in return for contracts, arms coming from us and the Commies—red-hot stuff. Once in the hands of the wrong people, they could cause a hell of a lot of bother. Marshall's trusted with this stuff, so presumably his secretary is, too.' Coppell drank. 'No one's said the ugly word, "spy," but it looks as if it's in someone's mind. The fact that Marshall's nipped off to Miami makes the whole thing look devilish fishy.'

'His secretary follows him tomorrow,' Roger said. 'That is if we let her go.'

Coppell put down his glass. 'Follows him!' he repeated sharply. 'Why?'

'She says he left a manuscript behind, and that he wants her to take it out to him. But I'm not at all sure I believe her. And I'm pretty certain that she smuggled some papers out of the house, when I told her we were going to search it.'

Coppell frowned: 'Did you *know* she was smuggling them out?'

'I suspected she was up to something.'

'Then why let her get away with it?'

'Well ——' Roger paused, 'if she *is* up to anything, she's now committed herself—at Chelsea she could have said she was simply considering following Marshall's instructions.'

'Crafty,' approved Coppell, and tossed the rest of his drink down. 'Anything else?'

'She didn't put up much of a fight to stop us from searching the place.'

'Meaning, the only thing that concerned her was getting those papers out,' Coppell mused. 'H'mm. What do you suggest?'

'Let her go, but delay her,' Roger said unhesitatingly.

'So?'

'So that I can get to Miami first. I need time to talk

to the Miami police and find out exactly who Marshall's gone to see If there's a plane tonight and she's delayed until tomorrow afternoon——' He broke off, not sure how Coppell would take this, wondering what Janet would say, wondering why so much pressure was being put on the Yard to get results quickly.

Coppell gave a half-smile.

'You're one on your own, Handsome, I will say that for you. You mean let her take the papers and be on the spot when she hands them over.'

So he hadn't turned the suggestion down.

'Yes,' Roger said. 'Then if the papers aren't as innocent as she made out, and she and Marshall do have something to hide, they may break down and talk.'

'Not a bad idea not bad at all,' said Coppell 'And I can tell you there's an eleven o'clock Pan Am flight tonight and a midnight B O.A.C., I've had it checked ' He gave a broad smile, delighted with his own foresight. 'Which plane will you take?'

'The B.O.A.C .' said Roger, thinking of Janet. He gave Coppell a thoughtful look 'I'll have Sloan in from Richmond to go through Marshall's place tonight and tomorrow,' he added, 'and then, if it's all right with you, I'll send him to Milan.'

Coppell pursed his lips. 'That man Ward? Why?'

'The quarrel between Ward and Marshall was very ugly,' said Roger. 'We still don't know what caused it, and I think we ought to find out. Sloan can talk to Ward in Milan tomorrow night, telephone a report to you—and if you think it's worthwhile, you can telephone me in Miami.'

'You'd never get away with this if I wasn't under pressure,' Coppell said 'All right. Tell Sloan '

'I'll call him right away,' promised Roger.

But he was still thinking more about how Janet would take the news that the holiday was to be postponed—in

an odd way, her attitude that morning made it more, not less, distasteful than it should have been.

. . .

'Lucky old Pop!' exclaimed Martin.

'Good old Dad!' approved Richard.

'If you can possibly stay for a few days after the case is settled, it would do you the world of good,' said Janet, as if quite unconcerned 'But try to find an hour to talk to Martin before you leave.'

'No need, as a matter of fact,' said Martin, with his usual calm. They were all in the living-room, sitting round a blank television screen. 'I've given it a lot of thought—I have, seriously. And I'm going to give up full-time art study. Another chap I know has an art shop—picture framing, copying, that kind of thing. He needs someone to help, and I've enough general knowledge for him I won't make a fortune but I *will* earn my keep, and study in my spare time.'

'Oh, *Scoop*!' Janet exclaimed. 'That's wonderful. Roger! Isn't it wonderful?'

She was commanding Roger to say yes.

'I'm very pleased,' Roger approved, and then looking squarely at his son, he added: 'But you'll have to stick to it, Scoop. It's a job, it's not——'

'Another way of getting all arty-crafty and long-haired,' Scoop finished for him. He grinned. 'I'll suck it out, Dad.'

'Now you can go to Miami with a clear conscience,' Richard declared, and ducked a blow his father aimed at him. 'Anybody want to see the news? Besides me, I mean.'

. .

Henrietta did not understand why another detective came to the house, instead of Superintendent West, but it did not trouble her, her jubilation at having got away with the documents lasted all the evening, and was still with her the next morning. She telephoned Mr. Wise, at the United States Consulate, and, as David had assured her, he promised priority in the issue of a visa.

'Come to the Consulate at the side of the Embassy and ask for me,' he said.

Sloan raised no objection to her going, and as Miss Toms was in, Henrietta did not mind leaving the police in possession. Everything went very smoothly. Wise was a big, youthful man, alert and efficient. She was in high spirits when she left—but these were dampened when she faced up to an inescapable question: *why* did David want the documents?

West was right—it *was* remarkable that, having heard of Yolande's death, he should go on to Miami. Knowing him, she was quite sure that it was a matter of vital importance. She was preoccupied about this until she reached Number 5, but Sloan soon drove it out of her mind. Suddenly, although he knew she had to catch that plane, he became unbelievably slow and obstructive.

'I'm sorry, Inspector,' she said at last, 'but I *must* leave for the airport within five minutes.'

Sloan looked at her in his rather innocent, schoolboy-like way.

'I'm sorry, Miss, but it won't be possible. There are several questions which must be asked and answered before you go.'

'But this is ridiculous!' she stormed 'I shall miss my plane!'

'There is another after lunch,' Sloan said soothingly. 'And I will have one of my men drive you to the airport.'

'But I insist ——' she began, beside herself.

He cut her short, almost regretfully.

'If you attempt to leave, miss, I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to come along to the Yard. But I'm sure that can be avoided, if you'll co-operate with us now.'

Henrietta made herself remember that it was no use starting a fight she couldn't win. If she was too insistent, he might delay her even longer. It crossed her mind that it was all being deliberately planned to stop her from leaving, but nothing Sloan said or did indicated this. He was extraordinarily thorough in searching, and his questions were mostly to do with what work she did. He also asked for a list of regular visitors—there were, she suddenly realised, very few. It was surprising how lonely David must be. Somehow, she hid her vexation.

Sloan did not create any further delay, and he did, as he had promised, send her to the airport with a police driver. The policeman actually carried her brief-case to the airport lounge for her, the case containing the documents which David was so anxious to have.

There was nothing unusual about going to the airport and boarding an aircraft, but all her previous flights had been to Europe. Everything was the same: the waiting for the 'now landing' instructions, the formalities with Immigration and Customs, the little straggling line of people walking along the still-unfinished passages to the buses, the friendly stewardesses and stewards.

Yet it was all very different; and the fact that she had managed to get the documents out of the house without the police discovering them, filled her with a strange sense of exhilaration, an exhilaration which was still with her when the east coast of Ireland dropped out of sight, and there was only the ocean below and ahead.

The man next to her began to snore gently.

There was a sense of wonder for her, too She made no attempt to read, it would almost certainly make her air-sick; but she closed her eyes and went over all the

questions which the police had asked her, everything she knew about the murder.

The flight took nearly seven hours.

It should, by English time, be ten o'clock when she reached New York. Instead, it was only five She was half-afraid of more delays, but there was nothing except the inevitable wait to have her passport examined and her visa checked. Then she was told there would be a flight for Miami in just over an hour There was no chance to go into New York but plenty of time to marvel at the vastness of the airport, the ceaseless roar of the coming and going of aeroplanes, the apparent casualness of everybody involved.

At last the call came for the Miami flight Henrietta trooped along a covered way towards the bay where the aircraft was waiting; it was all incredibly smooth and efficient For the first time she began to notice her fellow passengers, and found herself sitting next to an attractive Spanish woman who spoke little English.

Soon she settled down, again she closed her eyes, and concentrated—but on a different aspect of the situation Was she justified in doing exactly as she was told by David without asking questions? As a secretary, perhaps, but—as a friend?

Friend?

She was going to see him so much sooner than she had expected, and already her heart was beginning to beat faster. He mattered to her very much more than she had allowed herself to admit in the past—more than she had ever realised.

How would he welcome her?

Why did he want those documents so desperately?

Why did the police so obviously suspect him?

She was hardly aware of flying over the flat land of the Deep South, hardly aware of the tall white palaces of the Miami Beach hotels. Anxiously she scanned the

people waiting at the end of the passage at the airport, sure she would see him, sure that he would come to meet her.

But he was not there.

Hardly able to believe it, not sure what to do—whether to get a taxi to the hotel, or wait, she hovered near the gate where she had come off the aircraft. Disappointment gave way to bewilderment, bewilderment to concern, and she was getting really worried when a deeply sun-tanned woman in her early sixties, heavily lipsticked, heavily mascaraed, wearing a brilliant pink candy-striped dress and a large, floppy, matching hat, came up to her.

'You *are* Henrietta, aren't you? . . . I knew I couldn't be wrong, you're so obviously British!' She took Henrietta's hand. 'David wasn't able to get here, so he asked me to come instead.' She held on to Henrietta's hand rather too long, and then added: 'You know who *I* am, of course—I'm Cousin Chloe!'

16

COUSIN CHLOE

Oh, no, thought Henrietta, this can't be *David's* Cousin Chloe! But she found herself drawn close, almost absorbed in a huge, cushiony bosom, and kissed firmly on both cheeks.

'How very nice to meet you,' she said at last, as soon as she was able to break away.

People turned their heads, as they often did at the sound of her voice.

'How very nice to meet *you*, honey,' enthused Cousin Chloe. 'Let me look at you, now.' She stood Henrietta at arm's length and raked her from head to foot with bright brown eyes. 'My, but you make me jealous with that figure of yours. And I'll bet you don't even diet! Now we must get your baggage—do you have very much?'

'Only one case and this.' Henrietta held up the briefcase.

'Let me take that for you,' said Cousin Chloe, stretching her hand towards it.

Henrietta tightened her grip.

'No, thank you, I can manage this easily.'

They walked briskly through the air-cooled rooms, which Henrietta found slightly chilly, until they saw the luggage coming down a conveyor belt and being picked up by the passengers. Henrietta's case was not in sight, so they stood waiting. Surreptitiously, Henrietta studied David's cousin. She was so unlike David—and for that matter unlike Yolande—that it hardly seemed possible she *was* his cousin.

Then she saw her case, and stepped forward. As she lifted it, Cousin Chloe stepped forward and took it from her; and Henrietta had a sense of someone who was physically very strong.

'This way,' said Cousin Chloe, and turned.

Soon, they were approaching the main exit from the airport, and suddenly Henrietta found herself in a steam bath. The sun was blazing, the sky a beautiful blue—but it was so hot she caught her breath.

Cousin Chloe was striding towards an enormous car park. Henrietta, breathing deeply, forced herself to follow. There was a strong smell of oil, and twice she brushed against a car and found it so hot she stung her hand. She knew that her face must already be shiny, and she could feel the perspiration on her forehead.

At last, Cousin Chloe stopped by an enormous white car: it looked big enough for two—*three*—of her little mini-car at home She went automatically to the passenger side, and found herself staring at the wheel.

'Everyone from little old Britain does that,' declared Cousin Chloe, highly amused. 'I'll open your door from inside, honey.' Henrietta, still clutching her brief-case, so hot she could hardly believe it, walked round the car, which was radiating heat. David's cousin opened her door, leaned across and opened Henrietta's. The impossible happened. A gust of even hotter air blasted out of the car.

'Goodness,' thought Henrietta, 'I can't get in there'

Cousin Chloe got in, apparently without a thought. Gingerly, Henrietta did so too. The seat burned hot through her skirt, and the temperature was so high she thought she would faint. Cousin Chloe slammed the door and turned on the engine, which started at a touch—and immediately there was another blast of air from the front of the car; this was cold.

'I don't know what we did before air-conditioning,'

remarked Cousin Chloe. 'When I first came here there wasn't any in cars.'

'But didn't you *bake*?' gasped Henrietta.

'That's just about right, honey—we baked.' Cousin Chloe moved the car off slowly. 'You feeling better now?'

'Yes. I—I'm all right.' In fact, unbelievably, Henrietta now felt almost too cold. 'How long have you been here, Mrs——'

'You call me Chloe, honey, and I'll call you Henrietta, we're in America now! Thirty-two years. And I was twenty-nine when I came, so now you know how old I am!'

'That was before the war, then,' murmured Henrietta, a little embarrassed.

'Just before the war,' agreed Chloe. 'You were hardly born, honey. I ran away.'

'I'm sorry, I didn't quite hear you . .'

Cousin Chloe laughed.

'You heard but you couldn't believe me,' she said. 'I came away from Britain because Hitler scared the life out of me! And I came straight down to Miami. It wasn't the place it is now, but it was pretty nice even then. I took a job in one of the big hotels and I've been in the hotel business ever since.'

David had never said so, but Henrietta had always assumed that Cousin Chloe had money. As if reading her thoughts, Chloe gave another laugh, and darted a sideways glance towards her.

'I was on the poor side of the family—didn't you know there was a poor side?'

'I really hadn't given it any thought,' Henrietta said, truthfully.

'Well, I always did believe in calling a spade a spade,' said Cousin Chloe 'David's not wealthy, like Yolande was. *Her* side had the money!'

'I knew she was very rich,' admitted Henrietta.

'You've said it, honey. All that dough—and to be crazy along with it! I surely felt sorry for Yolande.' Chloe darted Henrietta another sharp glance. 'And I feel mighty sorry for David, too '

'He has had a very difficult time,' said Henrietta cautiously.

The laugh came again; was it a little forced?

'He's had a *hell* of a time, honey. Ever since he discovered what Yolande was like——'

'I *do* forgive me, but I'm not at all sure I *should* talk about David. He *is* my employer . . .'

'Forgive you? I'll do better than that, honey, I'll ignore you,' said Cousin Chloe. She put a big, well-shaped hand on Henrietta's knee. 'I haven't had a chance of talking about David for so long I would burst if I didn't talk to you. You want to know something?' she went on, taking her hand away and turning the car into a wide road, pausing long enough for Henrietta to see that they appeared to be driving on to a huge bridge. The water on either side was indescribably perfect blue, and in the distance the sky-line seemed vivid white 'I fixed David with an appointment he couldn't dodge, so I could come and talk to you and see what you were like.'

Henrietta's heart lifted. So *that* was why he hadn't come to meet her.

'You think I'm crazy, don't you, honey? So did the family—that's why they were glad when I came to America I didn't do them any good in little old Britain! So, as I was saying, David had one hell of a time. I'm glad *I* didn't do what he did.'

All Henrietta's training told her she shouldn't listen; all her instinct told her that she wanted to know. She did not have to ask.

'I married a poor man for love, honey,' Chloe went on. 'Maybe that sounds foolish the way things are today, but

it's what I wanted and I'm not sorry.' Now she shot a glance, almost sly, at Henrietta. 'Do you believe in marrying for love or for money?'

Three things were going on in Henrietta's mind. The implication that David had married Yolande for her money, was completely new to her, and after her first reaction—to dismiss it as impossible—it filled her with misgivings. The fact that Cousin Cloe was probing, was quite obvious. And thirdly, the sky-line was not so distant now. It looked like a miniature city, crystal-white in the sun, with a foreground of equally brilliant blue.

Very precisely, she said: 'I'm not at all sure I believe in marrying at all.'

'You don't——' began Cousin Chloe, and then she roared with laughter, rocking to and fro, so that for a moment Henrietta was afraid she would lose control of the car. But she didn't.

'I didn't think I was going to like you, honey,' she gasped at last, 'but I surely am. You don't believe in marrying at all—that's poppycock!'

'What makes you think so?' asked Henrietta, mildly.

'You're a woman,' Cousin Chloe answered simply. 'David's quite attractive, and now Yolande's dead he'll be rich as well. He's quite a catch, Henrietta.'

Henrietta felt inwardly cold, and, in a strange way, a little frightened.

For a few moments all she could think of was the fact that David would become rich, that the police obviously suspected him, and that he *did* have a strong motive for murdering his wife. It was a hideous possibility.

Slowly, her thoughts were drawn from her, for now they were much nearer the white buildings, and the sky-line seemed full of them—white castles standing beyond that sea of unbelievable blue. The vista helped; it soothed her.

'You think that's beautiful?' asked Cousin Chloe, unexpectedly.

'Oh, I do!'

'Sure, it's beautiful,' said Cousin Chloe. 'Folk say a lot about Miami Beach which isn't in its favour, but gee, it's beautiful. It's just about the most beautiful city in the world You're going to like it here.'

'I'll only be staying a few hours,' Henrietta remarked quickly.

'That's not the way David understands it, he's booked you a room for a week—I guess he wants to work you to death!' Cousin Chloe laughed raucously. 'And I don't mind telling you the Royalty is the most beautiful hotel in Miami Beach. It's the newest, it's the biggest, it's the best!'

'What do you do there?' asked Henrietta, trying not to think about being booked in for a week.

'I'm the Social Hostess,' answered Cousin Chloe. 'You got problems, folk?' she chanted, in exaggerated over-familiarity. 'Come and see Chloe, she'll fix them for you' Her voice changed back to normal. 'And honey, do they have problems!'

Henrietta felt a surge of sympathy, not for the folk with problems, but for Cousin Chloe. What an appalling job, she thought. She was, in fact, astonished to learn that Cousin Chloe *had* a job—she had known she lived in an hotel, but had always assumed it was as a guest

'As soon as we're back I'll be busy,' Cousin Chloe went on 'So I want to talk to you as much as I can now. David's tired. He is so tensed up it isn't true. I want him to take a course of massage up in the solarium—the Royalty's solarium is the greatest! And he needs therapy, honey, he needs you around. Help him relax, you understand.'

They were turning off the main road, a causeway across the water between Miami and Miami Beach, and

Cousin Chloe slowed down.

'We'll be at the Royalty in five minutes,' she said as they paused at a traffic signal. 'David will be waiting for you and maybe he'll be mad at me. But you want to know something, honey? If I can persuade David to invest some of that money he's just come into, I'm going to quit the hotel business and buy myself a consortium apartment north of Miami and do nothing. Just precisely nothing! I'm sixty-one, Henrietta, and don't tell me I don't look it. Yes, sir, I certainly look it! I nursed a sick husband, I saw my only daughter ruin her life with a no-good Englishman – no offence, honey, but did she marry a heel! And one of these days I'm going to sit back and do what I'm always telling others to do—I'm going to relax!'

Henrietta looked through the car window seeing the white palaces at close quarters now, the driveways that led up to each, the palms, the hibiscus, the bougainvilia, and all she could feel was a tremendous pity for this woman.

Then they took a curve in the road.

Just ahead of them was an enormous modern building, dazzling white, with pale blue facings at the windows. It was approached by a palm-lined drive, which ran through rich lawns, dotted with fountains and marble statues of ancient Greek gods and goddesses

'That's the Royalty,' Chloe said, and swung into the drive.

. . .

Henrietta felt like Alice in Wonderland.

Cousin Chloe took her through swing doors opened by uniformed doormen into a vast hall, two walls of which were lined with mirrors, giving an illusion of even greater spaciousness. The colourings of the huge couches and

chairs were green and gold and pale blue, the tables beside them were gilt and marble-topped. In the centre of the room was another fountain, beside it, two more statues Apart from the ripple of the water, there was a strange hush, as if in fact only the statues lived here.

'I'm going to send you up to David I have to go to the pool patio and make sure no one's got problems.' Cousin Chloe beckoned a uniformed bell-boy, a handsome Spanish-looking youth with thick dark hair. 'Pedro,' she said, 'take the lady up to eleven-o-one. You understand that?—eleven-o-one.'

'Sure do, ma'am,' said Pedro.

Chloe patted Henrietta's arm, and went striding away across the hall.

The bell-boy flashed a row of glistening white teeth at Henrietta and led her to a row of elevators, one of which stood open. He ushered her inside, pressed a button and the doors closed without a sound; almost before she realised they had started, the elevator stopped and the doors opened. They stepped out into soft-lit luxury in rose pink.

'Turn right, Miss.' The passage stretched an illimitable distance, they seemed to walk for a mile, until at last they reached a door marked 1101. As they reached it, it opened—and David stood there.

He held out his arms.

Pedro turned and walked softly away.

Henrietta had never known her heart beat so furiously, never realised how much it meant to look on David's face.

'Come in,' he said huskily, taking her case and leading her into the room. He closed the door, put the case down, then took her in his arms. After a moment he drew away a little, looked down on her, and lifting his arm, tipped her face up with a finger on her chin

'My God, how I love you!' he said, and slowly, very

slowly, lowered his face towards hers.

Everything, *everything* else was forgotten. Henrietta knew the answer then, knew how much he mattered. She had never felt like this, her head was swimming, her body seemed to melt against his. Then suddenly, rudely, the ecstasy of the moment was shattered by a sharp rap at the door. David's body stiffened.

'Who's there?' he called harshly.

The words came clearly through the closed door. 'Chief Superintendent West, sir. I would like a word with you.'

17

THE CONFRONTATION

'West!' gasped Henrietta.

'The Yard—here!' muttered David, his hands falling helplessly to his side.

Before he could speak again, before Henrietta had even started to recover from the shock, the door opened and Roger West appeared.

. . .

Roger saw how closely they were standing together, and he could still hear the echo of Sir David Marshall's vibrant voice as he had said: 'My God, how I love you.' Slowly, Marshall stepped back, and awkwardly, perhaps with some embarrassment, Henrietta moved slightly to one side.

'I will see you later, West. Not now.' Marshall spoke with some curtness.

'Now, sir, if you please.' The gentleness of Roger's voice did nothing to dispel its unmistakable note of authority.

'No. Later. You have no authority.'

West's expression was as bland as ever, his voice as gentle.

'I have the co-operation of the police of Miami and of Miami Beach, sir. I've no desire to call on them, and I hope there will be no need to do so.'

. . .

Henrietta thought with sickening anxiety: 'He wouldn't behave like this unless he *knew* something against David. He wouldn't dare.' And she thought: 'The Miami police wouldn't co-operate unless they were sure, too.'

She looked at David, only at David.

She saw the tension on his face, the drawn, near-haggard expression, the set intensity of his eyes which seemed to be looking into some secret hell.

She thought: 'David, oh David, what have you done?'

And she thought: 'David, David, how can I help you?'

. . .

Roger West, still standing in the doorway, studied the face of the man inside the room. The bruises no longer disfigured him, although one eye and one side of the mouth were still slightly discoloured. There might be tension in his expression, even pain; but fear? If there were fear, Marshall concealed it with remarkable success. West looked from him to Henrietta Lyle, piquant-faced, her beautiful eyes shadowed with dismay. There was something between these two which he did not quite understand, and the natural thing for a policeman to assume was—conspiracy.

'Well, sir?' he asked at last, looking back to Marshall.

David drew in a long, deep breath, then picked up the brief-case. 'You'd better come inside,' he said flatly.

West walked into a big, light, cool room, with wide windows. A chair was standing out from a small desk which was littered with papers, and two armchairs, low and inviting, stood by a round table in the window. The girl dropped into one of these as if her legs could not carry her any longer.

Roger glanced quickly at the window. It wasn't open, there was no way in which Marshall could get rid of the brief-case. In fact he put it on the round table, a brown leather, much-worn case with several labels on it: Rome, Paris, Zurich. Then he turned towards West

'Superintendent'—his voice was well controlled, West noticed—'this is very like persecution. Why have you followed me from London?'

'Because I need to ask you some questions, sir, and you left London before I had an opportunity to do so.'

'You have gone to extreme lengths, surely.'

'It is a matter of extreme importance, sir.'

'What is it about?' demanded Marshall.

Was he deliberately playing for time? wondered West.

'Why did you leave England when you knew your wife had been brutally murdered, sir?' he asked.

'The first I heard of my wife's death was when I was told by a police officer at New York Airport.'

'I see, sir. In that case, why didn't you then fly straight back to London? Scotland Yard's request that you should was passed on to you, presumably.'

'It was, indeed.' Marshall gave a wry smile. 'In fact it was probably this which was the deciding factor in my continuing the journey to Miami.'

'You mean you were afraid to come back?' rapped Roger.

Marshall's expression did not change and his gaze did not waver.

'Not afraid in the sense you mean it, Mr. West Not afraid of the police, or what they could do. But afraid of the publicity, the headlines, the stories of my wife's—ailment, the constant questioning by newspapermen, by you, the unpleasantness, the pressures, the nervous tension, yes. I was and I still am afraid of those things.'

The words conjured a vivid picture. But before Roger could comment, Marshall went on:

'Why are the police so interested in me, Superintendent?'

Roger chose his words with care. 'We believe you may be able to help us with the enquiries into your wife's death, sir.'

'Do you mean you think I killed my wife, and then ran away?' asked Marshall drily.

He's not afraid of facing the situation, anyhow, thought Roger How should he answer, he wondered. He could either evade Marshall's counter-question, or take it at its face value.

'Yes,' he answered, after a brief pause. 'That is what we are considering.'

'Oh, *no*!' Henrietta leaned forward in her chair, her eyes enormous in her pale face.

Marshall stretched out a hand to touch her shoulder.

'What makes you think that? he asked, almost casually.

'Lady Marshall was a rich woman, sir, and you stand to inherit a substantial sum.'

'But I already have all the money I need, Superintendent. Is that the only evidence against me?'

Roger frowned Was Marshall laughing at him, he wondered.

'No, sir I understand that you left your home at five minutes to twelve on the night of the murder and returned two hours later. You were seen heading towards Putney which, as you know, sir, is on the road to Richmond.'

Henrietta was gazing at Marshall, as if imploring him to deny that he had been out. Would he deny it? wondered Roger.

Marshall shrugged. 'Yes, I was out. And I drove past the nursing home. But I did *not* go inside, Superintendent.'

'Were you alone, sir?'

'I was.'

'Then no one can support your statement that you did not go inside, can they, sir?'

'No,' Marshall agreed. 'I'm afraid not. But ——'

'David,' Henrietta interrupted in a tense voice, 'where *did* you go that night?'

'I drove past Yolande's nursing home to remind myself of what could have been,' said Marshall. His voice was strained. 'And I drove past your flat, to remind myself of what could still be' The pressure of his hand on her shoulder tightened; then he withdrew it, and moved to the window. He stood silently for a moment, his back to the room, looking down on the brilliantly blue sea. Then, suddenly, he swung round to face West. 'I did not kill my wife, Superintendent, although I had both motive and opportunity'

'Do you know who did, sir?'

'I do not.'

'Do you know of anyone else with a motive, sir?'

'No.'

Roger turned to Henrietta, and drew himself up a little more stiffly.

'Do *you* know of anyone with a motive, Miss Lyle?'

. . .

Henrietta looked at West blankly, then, slowly, she began to understand the implication of his question, and felt an icy coldness steal over her body.

West thought that *she* had a motive!

He thought *she* had wanted Yolande dead, so that she could marry David!

. . .

'If she does know anything, she'll crack now,' thought Roger.

'Miss Lyle—answer me, please.' His voice was sharp. 'Do *you* know anyone with a motive?'

Henrietta spoke with unexpected steadiness. 'No. No, Superintendent, I don't.'

'Do *you* have a motive?' Roger moved forward and gripped her forearm. 'Did *you* want Lady Marshall dead?'

'No!' cried Henrietta.

'Come on, Miss Lyle, let's have the truth! Did you kill——?'

'Of course I didn't!' Henrietta Lyle's expression changed, anger replaced shock and flashed in her eyes. 'You are impertinent, Superintendent. Let me go at once.' Haughtiness, imperiousness, now sounded in her voice.

But Roger thought: 'Why is Marshall so silent?'

. . .

Henrietta thought: 'Why is David letting him do this to me?'

. . .

'Superintendent,' said Marshall, very quietly, 'I understand that American police methods can be rougher than ours. Is this a case of when in Rome doing what the Romans do?'

Roger swung round on him. 'It's a case of finding out who killed your wife, sir.'

'You won't find out here,' Marshall retorted. 'Neither I nor Miss Lyle know anything about it. I concede your right to suspect and to interrogate, but not your right to manhandle Miss Lyle. Please don't do that again.'

Roger drew away from the girl and, for the first time, looked at the brief-case.

'Miss Lyle had a telephone call from you in New York, sir. I don't know the precise terms of the conversation, but I do know that Miss Lyle immediately flew to join you here. I also know that she had a package addressed to a firm of booksellers when she left me at your house, but that she did not post the package. I have reason to suspect that it is in that brief-case and that it contains certain papers.' Roger looked closely from Marshall to Henrietta. 'May I see those papers, sir?'

For a moment there was silence. Then Marshall stepped forward. 'They are private and personal.'

'I will treat them with absolute confidence, sir.'

'I repeat—they are private and personal —'

'I'm sorry, sir.' Roger spoke heavily. 'I think those documents may contain certain information of great importance to Great Britain and probably to other governments. And they may also give a clue to the reason for the murder of your wife. I'm afraid I must ask you to let me have that case at once.'

18

THE DOCUMENTS

HENRIETTA thought, this gets more and more absurd; it's utterly ridiculous. David, a *spy*. David, a *murderer*? Had the police gone mad? She looked up at him, and saw the last thing she expected—a little twitch at his mouth, a characteristic when he was amused but didn't want to show it. He picked up the case.

'If you say so, Superintendent.' He held out his hand. 'Let me have the key, Henrietta.'

Henrietta fumbled in her bag, found the key, and held it out. David took it.

'Superintendent,' he said, 'I am not a murderer, nor am I a spy. In fact I am not a criminal of any kind.' He handed West the key.

'Thank you, sir.' Roger placed the brief-case on the table in the window, and something caught Henrietta's eye. She glanced up, to see an aeroplane pulling a sign across the sky; she caught the word 'steak'. Beyond, on that brilliant sea, were some small sailing ships and several white launches and, almost on the horizon, two large ships; she saw, yet was hardly aware of these. West was holding the case in one hand and inserting the key with the other. His movements were firm and deliberate; there was no fumbling, no missing the keyhole. He put back the flap which kept the case closed; and it sprang open.

She noticed that he kept his head on one side, almost as if he expected something to explode.

David was watching him as closely, still with that glint of amusement.

Inside, Henrietta knew, were the papers he had been

working on, her excuse for coming to Miami, and the three sealed packets. West took the open file out first, thumbed through it, then put it back. Any moment, thought Henrietta, he would find the packages still addressed to the booksellers still tied round with string. She remembered bitterly how jubilant she had been when she had smuggled it out of the house.

As she watched him, there was a sound at the door. Henrietta heard it a split-second before the men, and glanced round. By then the sound had become identifiable—very quietly, very cautiously, a key was being turned in the lock.

'Who's there?' called West sharply.

'The porter, sir,' a man called.

'I don't want a porter. Go away.'

There was a moment's pause, followed by another sharp click of sound, and the door was thrust back. A young man with a very pale face stepped swiftly inside, a gun in his right hand. He was thrusting it forward, towards West. 'Don't move!' he rapped.

He was followed by a dark-haired youth, Pedro, thought Henrietta, recognising the boy who had brought her up in the elevator. The man with the gun muttered something in a language which Henrietta did not understand, and Pedro came forward, moving slowly, stealthily, his brown eyes enormous, as if he were touched by fear. His hands were outstretched as he looked from one person to the other, then at the briefcase.

'*Apurate!*' rasped the man at the door.

The youth started, then snatched at the case.

'*Apurate!*'

'What can be in it?' thought Henrietta wildly. 'What can be in it?'

. . .

'Aha,' thought Roger, 'so it *does* contain something that matters!' He had seen neither of the intruders before, but could tell that the youth was nervous from the way his lips quivered.

'Don't touch this case,' he ordered.

'Take it!' hissed the man in the door. He looked venomously at Roger.

The case was still in Roger's hands. He could hold on to it or let it go, and if he held on he had no doubt that the man at the door would shoot Help should be at hand but it didn't appear to be, the men could get away with the case and everything in it.

The youth was gripping it now

'Let him have it!' the man with the gun spat, in English. 'If you don't!'

Roger pulled it free and kneed the youth in the stomach, then raised the case in a single swift movement in front of his face. He heard the snarl of a shot, a gasp from the girl, the thudding as the youth backed away—and he felt a jolt against the case. There was a thump against his forehead, and for a few seconds everything went black. As if from a great distance, he could hear other, heavier sounds; another shot, then a roar which seemed to deafen him.

After that, a strange silence fell, lasting for a moment which seemed an age before a man said:

'Are you okay, Roger?'

Slowly, Roger put his hand to his forehead. To his surprise, he felt something wet.

'Yes, I'm fine,' he said, then stared down at the blood on his fingers.

. . .

Henrietta stared at the blood, coming from a wound in West's forehead, just above his left eye The whole scene

was vivid on her mind, like a tableau. West, wounded; the case, slipping from his grasp; the youth Pedro cringing back against the wall; the man who had shot West lying on the floor, where he had fallen; a man in a pale grey suit holding a smoking gun.

The man on the floor had a big red stain on his white shirt, and Henrietta saw it was on the left side.

She sensed that he was dead.

Then, suddenly, everyone seemed to move at once. Other men came in from the passage, one of them in uniform. David turned to her and took her hands. In the distance someone said: 'He's dead,' and closer at hand another man said: 'You're hurt, Roger Let me look at that wound.' Then, all at once, she was in David's arms, being crushed to him She had never known such strength, never known what it was to be held so tightly.

For a while, it was as if there was no one else in the world but David; no sound but the whisper of his voice, 'Oh my love, my love, my love . . .' Then she heard West saying: 'Sir David . Sir David . . Sir David . . .' The voice grew louder, and suddenly exploded in her ear, and she was blasted from the stillness and the oasis world into reality.

'Sir David!'

David drew back from her.

West stood nearby, touching David's shoulder. They must have been standing like that for a long time, for now there was a plaster on West's forehead, covering the wound. Behind him was the man who had fired the revolver. Over by the door, the man who had been shot lay with a sheet over him. A uniformed policeman stood by the open door, a man with a camera was aiming over his shoulder.

The youth Pedro had gone.

The brief-case was still on the table. The metal fastener had a hole in it, quite small, round, dark. The

bullet must have pierced the metal before striking West; if it hadn't, he would have been killed. He was as self-possessed as ever, none the less

Now David let her go and was looking at West.

'Did you know you were in danger?' West demanded.

'No,' answered David. 'Not here, certainly, but——'

'Give me a straight answer, sir, please.'

'I suspected there was danger, both to me and my wife, but I didn't expect it here,' David said very carefully.

Danger? thought Henrietta, what danger had he known about? *Danger*. One man was dead and another had narrowly missed death, because of what was in the briefcase. What was the danger? Why hadn't David told her?

'What kind of danger?' demanded West.

'Of being murdered,' David answered calmly.

It was crazy, thought Henrietta, she couldn't be hearing properly, and yet she was. She moved to a chair and dropped into it.

'You *expected* it!' muttered the man with the gun. He moved towards West and David.

West seemed suddenly to become aware of his existence.

'Sir David, this is Lieutenant Thompson, who has been attached to the enquiry by the Miami Beach police.'

'Lieutenant,' David said, nodding.

'I wish I could say I was glad to meet you,' said Thompson. 'Who can be glad about this?'

'When were you first aware of the danger?' asked West.

A shadow passed across David's face.

'Shortly after our marriage my wife became a very sick woman, Superintendent, and as is often the case with mental disorders, her love for me turned, almost over-

night, to a fanatical hatred. The writer of those anonymous letters took advantage of her sickness by fanning this hatred, until at last she made an attempt to murder me. I hushed this up—persuaded the family doctor to say nothing After the police had been called in over the attempted suicide, I felt, perhaps misguidedly, that any more attention might make her insanity permanent A useless precaution as it turned out. And shortly afterwards she went away to the nursing home.'

'So you were safe from any further attack, Sir David.' West sounded sceptical.

'Safe from any further attack my wife might have made, Superintendent, but what about the person who so exploited her sickness? And what about Yolande's safety? I had very good reason to believe that the person who wrote those letters wanted us *both* dead!'

'So you went to Miami to forget about it.' West sounded even more sceptical.

'No, Superintendent I came to Miami to see the only person whom I believed might be able to help me find the person responsible.'

'And who did you think could help you?'

'My cousin, Chloe Renati,' David answered. 'She works here as a social hostess. In fact you can probably see her in the pool patio if you look out of the window.'

The grey-suited man moved to the window. Henrietta looked out, too.

There in the sunlit patio, with the huge pool dotted with people swimming or floating, with hundreds of people lying on the beaches and dozens of colourful umbrellas dotted about, was Chloe. It was impossible to mistake her in her pink candy-striped dress and big floppy hat. She was standing with her back to the pool, a group of people in swimsuits about her. Even from here, it was possible to see that she was talking gaily, waving her arms, and something she said caused a burst of

laughter; people surged away from her, while she threw back her head and roared with laughter.

'Why should your cousin be able to help you?' asked West.

David pursed his lips, then moved and put a hand on Henrietta's shoulders; she felt its warmth and knew that he meant to comfort her, almost, it seemed, to protect her.

'She might know the whereabouts of the person I suspect,' he said quietly. He gestured towards the briefcase. 'It's all in there; everything I have been searching for several months to find out who was doing such harm to Yolande, who has worked on her mental weakness, who had taken advantage of her madness so that she longed to kill me. Everything is there, West, a copy of my will, of Yolande's, the result of all my enquiries. The only surviving members of the family who would benefit my death and Yolande's, are Chloe, her married daughter and the daughter's husband. Chloe I trust absolutely, absolutely,' repeated David firmly 'But the daughter married a bit of a rogue, so I understand, and——' He broke off.

Henrietta, staring out of the window at Chloe and the group now much closer to her, heard West say:

'Have you talked to her about this?'

'No I wanted the documents first.'

'Yet you left them behind?' West's voice was disbelieving. 'An issue of such importance? When *are* you going to tell the truth, Sir David?'

It was almost impossible to believe that he would actually call David a liar, thought Henrietta, yet he had Lieutenant Thompson turned from the window There were mutterings which sounded like protests in the hall but no interruption.

'I left them behind deliberately,' David said. 'That is the truth.'

'And why should you do that, sir?' West sounded even more sceptical.

'To bring Henrietta—Miss Lyle—out here,' David said with quiet emphasis. 'I wanted to spend some time with her outside the atmosphere of my work. I knew that nothing would make her come unless it was really important. And I knew that I couldn't pretend something was important if it wasn't—I couldn't deceive her, it would have spoiled everything. So I had to have a genuine reason for needing her—apart, of course, from the fact that I love her. *That's* not a crime, is it, Superintendent?'

Henrietta thought, almost in anguish: 'I made him do this, I was no help at all' She could not look away from David He smiled at her in a strange, haunted way, then turned back to West.

'No, no crime, sir, but——' West paused, went to the window, and looked down at the patio. Then suddenly he swung round.

'If Mrs. Renati does know anything, then she might be in danger, too. How soon can you get her up here, Ivor?'

'My God!' breathed Thompson. 'I'll go get her, right now.'

19

THE TELEPHONE CALL

WEST was alone with Marshall and the girl

Policemen, photographers and newspapermen were at the door, as Thompson strode towards the elevators, but no one tried to get in to the room West could not keep his gaze off the hostess by the pool She was laughing again but she could be attacked as easily as Yolande had been attacked

David and Henrietta, touched by the same tension, were also staring down.

Making a conscious effort, West made himself turn away from the window Without a word he picked up the brief-case again, and took out the package. Slitting it open with his thumb, he drew out three envelopes, each marked 'Family'. Marshall's explanation was just plausible, he thought, but he could well have lied.

The first envelope contained reports from the Minerva Inquiry Agency—a reputable firm, Roger knew on their endeavours to trace all surviving members of the Marshall family. Skimming swiftly through them, he found as Marshall had said, that there appeared to be only Chloe and her daughter, who, it seemed, had vanished five years earlier. In the second envelope was a copy of Marshall's will, and, attached to it, a copy of Lady Marshall's.

Still holding the documents in his hand, West walked back to the window.

Everything was going on in the same way down in the patio. At one end of the pool five youths were standing as

if ready to dive in. By the side a man was standing with a starter's pistol in his hand.

Pistol!

'My God,' thought West, 'he's pointing at Chloe Renati!'

'Look out!' he bellowed.

The next instant the starter pointed the gun into the air and fired. There was the crack of the shot, a puff of smoke, and the five youths dived into the pool. Almost at once, Lieutenant Thompson appeared with two of his men. Obviously he called out to the hostess, who turned to look at him. Even from this distance, Roger could see the sudden consternation on her face.

The next moment, she turned and ran.

And as she did so, scattering spectators right and left, the telephone bell rang.

Henrietta, David, Roger, remained motionless at the window; and the bell kept ringing

Chloe Renati reached a doorway of the hotel building; she was still clearly visible to Roger from his vantage point at the window, but not to the police below, he thought, the crowd will hide her

'Shall I answer that?' called a man from outside the bedroom door.

'No, I'll get it,' Roger called back tautly. The police had broken through the crowd and were now at the door where Chloe had disappeared; perhaps Thompson could see more than he thought. He stepped to the telephone, which was at the bedside table, and lifted the receiver. 'This is Sir David Marshall's room.' It would be for Marshall, of course, and——

'Is Superintendent West with you?' the operator asked.

'This is West speaking'

'There is a telephone call for you from London, England, sir. Will you take it?'

'Yes, I will.'

'Hold on,' the operator told him.

There was a moment of silence, and Marshall and the girl turned away from the window. Marshall's arm was round Henrietta Lyle's shoulders.

Then voices sounded on the telephone, followed by one which West recognised.

'That you, West?' It was Coppell.

'West speaking, sir.'

'I've been having a hell of a job to get you,' growled Coppell. 'I've had a call from Milan. Somehow or other Ward got wind that we wanted to have a talk with him, and by the time Sloan got there he'd left.'

'H'mm. Looks a bit odd, doesn't it, sir?' West frowned.

'You'll think it odder still when I tell you where he's gone.' Coppell paused.

'Back to England, sir?' Roger hazarded. If Coppell had something important to say, why the devil didn't he say it, he thought irritably.

'No, West, not England.' Coppell sounded perturbed. 'He's on his way to Miami Beach.'

. . .

Miami Beach! The words rang in Roger's ears as he replaced the receiver. Ward was coming to Miami Beach! Was he coming after the Lyle girl? Or could it be . . .?

Roger sprang towards the door, but before he could reach it footsteps came stamping along the passage, and Ivor Thompson came in, looking hot and angry.

'Get her?' demanded Roger, but he knew the answer before Thompson spoke.

'We will. This place is like a maze on the shopping concourse, she dodged through one of the shops to the

street, and got away. But we'll pick her up soon I've sent two men to her apartment and two are watching her car.'

'What about the airport?' demanded Roger.

'We've covered that, too—but she won't fly out.'

'I don't expect her to,' Roger said. 'But she may be meeting someone. Are there direct flights from Milan, Italy, to Miami Beach?'

'Only by charter planes, sir. Though there are plenty of direct flights from Frankfurt, which isn't so far from Milan. But where does Milan come in?'

Henrietta Lyle was turning round, now, tense with new interest.

'The murderer may not rely on his accomplices here to kill Sir David,' Roger said. 'He may come himself. Sir David—you know that your cousin, Chloe Renati, and her daughter and son-in-law are obvious suspects. Did you come here, not, as you said, to ask for Mrs Renati's help, but to force the issue?'

Marshall shrugged his shoulders.

'You know so much, Superintendent, you might as well know that as well,' he said wearily 'Yes.'

. . .

'He *has* been lying,' Henrietta thought wildly. 'He's lied all along, what else has he lied about?'

. . .

'You meant to force the issue once and for all?' West demanded.

'Yes, I did.'

'Have you told Mrs. Renati this?'

'Yes.'

'Has she admitted any part in the crimes?'

'No. She swears she doesn't know where her daughter is.'

'Do you believe her?'

'No.'

'Do *you* know where the daughter is?'

'No, I do not.'

'Sir David, did you expect to meet danger here?'

'Possibly.'

'Danger of murder?'

'Yes.'

'Then if you knew the situation was so dangerous, and if you have such a deep regard for Miss Lyle, *why* did you lure her to Miami?' West demanded. 'Do you really love her? Or did you want to get all possible suspects down here and try and set them one against the other. So that you could discover the truth?'

20

THE TRUTH

HENRIETTA thought, appalled and yet believing: 'He suspected *me*! He still suspects me! Oh, God, where is it going to end?

. . .

'Did you, sir?' barked Roger. 'The *truth*, remember.'

Slowly and painfully Marshall answered, looking at Henrietta as he did so, not at West.

'Yes, that is exactly what I planned to do.'

'What chance did you think you had of succeeding?' demanded Roger. 'One against three or four or five, for all you knew.'

'There was no other way,' Marshall said.

'You could have come to us.'

'I had no faith in you,' said Marshall. 'I didn't see how you could solve a problem partly centred here in Miami, and in any case I wanted no—publicity.'

'What chance do you think you had?'

'Have you opened all the envelopes?' asked Marshall.

'No. What does that matter?'

'In one there is a statement which I proposed to give to everyone here,' said Marshall. 'It shows whom I suspect, and why. A copy is with my bank in London, to be opened on my death. I typed this myself, no one else knows what is in it. I believed that would frighten them all.'

'Even Miss Lyle?'

'If she was involved, yes.'

Henrietta gave a little sigh, hardly a sound at all. How could he possibly think she was involved? Marshall stretched out his hand towards her, but she did not stir to take it.

'Why did you suspect her?' Roger demanded

Marshall hesitated, then moved so that he could look down on Henrietta, and spoke as if she were the only one in the room.

'I suspected you, Henrietta, partly because you were so often aloof. Sometimes it was as if you could hardly stand my presence—yet at other times you were warm and understanding and able to make me confide in you I talked to you about everything except my deeper fears. I was absolutely sure of you whenever we were talking, but when you became aloof again when you pushed me away, as you so often did—I wondered whether you were simply playing cat and mouse with me, almost seducing me to talk and tell you something you needed to know.'

Henrietta was looking at him as if she could not believe that such a suspicion was even possible. There was no colour at all in her cheeks.

'But most important of all,' went on Marshall, 'I suspected you because—because you were so friendly with Gerald Ward. No, Henrietta, not just because I was jealous—though God knows, I was—but because'—Marshall paused, looking intently into Henrietta's eyes—'because he was the man whom I believed sent those letters to Yolande—the man I believed to be plotting not only my death but hers Hetty darling'—he bent towards her—'Ward may love you now, I couldn't understand the fellow if he didn't, but at first he was only using you to keep a track on my movements.'

'Ward,' thought Henrietta. 'Gerry Ward.' It was as if David were talking about someone she barely knew. A stranger.

'Then on Monday night I went to the nursing home,' Marshall continued. 'I wanted to see Dr. Courtways—and I saw Ward, in her car. I came away without letting them see me—and I knew then that it was possible that he was working in collusion with Dr. Courtways. When he came to fetch you the next evening I could have killed him. It wasn't only jealousy, Henrietta—it was fear that you were working with him.'

Lieutenant Thompson touched Roger's arm and drew him away.

'Roger.'

'Yes?'

'There's a flight from Frankfurt due in forty-five minutes.'

'Can we get there?'

'Surely.'

'Is Mrs. Renati at the airport?'

'She hasn't been seen yet. You coming?'

'Yes. Can you get that body out of here?'

'Don't worry, I've fixed another room for Sir David. Okay to leave them with a guard?'

'I shouldn't—there might be other hired assassins.'

'I guess so. I've talked to the manager, he'll see to them.' Thompson took Roger's arm. 'Let's go.' Outside in the passage he said to his men: 'When these two go to another room, stay with them at the door.'

'Sure,' a short, dark man said.

'Think you've got the truth at last?' Thompson went on, as he and West walked to the elevators.

'I think so,' Roger said.

An elevator opened almost at their bidding. In a moment they walked through the cool marble hall, stood for a second in the oven-heat of the driveway, stepped into an air-conditioned police car which drew up immediately, and were off along Collins towards the causeway. In twenty minutes they were at the airport; in

thirty the announcement came for the arrival of the flight from Frankfurt; and five minutes later they moved towards the bay where the aircraft would unload.

Standing near it was a group of people, waiting to meet passengers Hovering unobtrusively on the fringe of the group was a big woman dressed in a pink candy-striped dress and wearing a floppy hat, the limp brim of which hid her forehead and the upper part of her face.

'*There she is*,' Thompson whispered. 'We going to wait to see if your man comes off?'

Roger nodded.

More people arrived to meet the aircraft, and now the group was joined by airline company officials and porters. Suddenly there was bustle, and tired-looking passengers began to disembark.

Roger counted thirty-one. More were coming but he was beginning to wonder if he were right, when Gerald Ward appeared. One arm was in a plaster and he carried only a light-weight brief-case He glanced round quickly, but did not seem to recognise Chloe Renati. He started forward—and she moved quickly and barred his path.

He stopped and backed away It was the alarm in his eyes which first warned Roger, and warned Thompson at the same moment. Thompson roared and jumped forward, Chloe Renati snatched a pistol from the folds of her dress, two policemen closed on Ward as he dodged, Thompson struck Chloe Renati's hand to one side, and the pistol clattered on the ground.

. . .

'That's right,' Chloe Renati said. 'He *is* my son-in-law, and I hate his guts. He's treated my daughter so badly he's nearly driven her crazy Sure, he told her what he was planning, that he'd get rid of David and Yolande and then we'd all be in the money—but we never believed him. He's always been a small-time crook, always talked

big, but never been involved in anything but petty theft. And women, of course. Gee, how those women fell for him—he seemed to mesmerise them into doing anything he wanted. When I heard about poor Yolande—I never liked the woman, but that doesn't mean I want to see her murdered, *or* my daughter married to a murderer—I just saw red, I guess. Something seemed to crack. Why did you have to stop me?' she demanded bitterly. 'That man's so bad he oughtn't to be allowed to live.'

. . .

In Police Headquarters on Miami Beach, Gerald Ward said:

'She's a crazy woman. The whole family's crazy. You're not going to take any notice of her, surely.'

'Not much. I'd rather rely on the testimony of Dr. Courtways,' bluffed Roger.

Ward started. 'Damn the woman. Why couldn't she keep her mouth shut! I told her——' He broke off. But he had said enough to confirm Marshall's suspicions, and Roger now knew that it would only be a matter of time before the case against both him and Dr. Courtways was proved.

. . .

'I'm going back to England tonight,' Roger told Marshall later. 'There's no reason at all why you and Miss Lyle shouldn't stay here if you wish. I may have to ask you to fly back to help with enquiries, but I won't, if it's avoidable.'

'You're very good,' said Marshall. 'Just one question, Superintendent. Was my cousin a party to the plot?'

'She wasn't, sir,' Roger said. 'Like you, sir, she had a single-minded intention of settling her own debts. Ward

had treated her daughter so badly that she could think only of killing him.'

'If I hadn't come to Miami, do you think this would have been cleared up so soon?' asked Marshall.

'Very possibly, sir,' said Roger. 'And possibly without bloodshed out here The two who attacked you and came for the brief-case were paid by Mrs. Renati, who swears that she had no thought of violence; they were simply to get the brief-case and find out what was in it. You had told her the papers were coming, hadn't you?'

Marshall nodded 'Yes, I had But I still think this was the quickest way to resolve the issue. All the same, Superintendent,' he added, 'I'm very grateful to you for coming out after me What made you realise that something was going on?'

'That quarrel between you and Ward was far too violent to be explained as a quarrel over Miss Lyle,' Roger reasoned. 'There was real hatred in that quarrel If you had stayed in England I would have questioned you again about this, and I think you would have told me of your suspicions—and of the association between Ward and Dr. Courtways It could have been solved, sir—though not, I'm afraid, in time to have saved your wife' Roger held out his hand. 'And now, sir,' he added. 'I hope you and Miss Lyle will take the opportunity to spend a few days in the sun. We don't get much of it at home.'

'I'm sure we will,' said Henrietta Lyle. 'I *know* we will.'

. . .

Three days later she lay beneath an umbrella, very warm, very content, oblivious of the patio noises going on about her. Opening her eyes, she saw David. He was wearing shorts, a loose shirt, and sandals, and was

already more sunburned than she.

'Are you going to have any lunch today?' he asked.

'I don't know,' she said lazily. 'Must I?'

'Yes,' he said. 'A walk on the promenade and then we'll go to the coffee shop' He put a hand on her shoulder. 'I've had a cable from West.'

Henrietta caught her breath.

'Good or bad?'

'It *was* Dr. Courtways who killed Yolande. She and Ward have made a joint statement. The plot was to kill Yolande first and then kill me and make it look like suicide. And if things went wrong over Yolande's death, then you and I were to be the obvious suspects.' He slipped an arm round her shoulders. 'But it's all over now, darling.'

'David,' she whispered.

'Yes?'

'I do love you.'

'I won't ever doubt that again,' he promised.

VINTAGE CREASEY FROM CORONET

ALIBI FOR INSPECTOR WEST

'As a point of interest Miss Dunster, were the other two witnesses in your bed at the same time?'

A trivial enough question, but it proves to be Roger West's near-fatal blunder because it antagonises his superiors and attracts the glare of hostile publicity. West is left on his own to play a hunch and connect a bizarre assault case to a dangerous drugs racket or perish in the attempt – but he can only do this if the alibi is a phoney.

The investigations lead him far beyond his expectations, and to financial temptations beyond the dreams of an honest cop.

SEND INSPECTOR WEST

When he finally uncovered the motive for the kidnapping, West received the biggest shock of his [redacted]

Ricky Shawn was a mere child – a frightened, cowering child. But the men who held him as a pawn in their ruthless game cared little for that. It was his determination to find Ricky that set Roger West on the path of danger once again, this time bound for the States.

With a good many names on his list of suspects – among them the charming Lissa; and, oddly enough, the distressed parents – and an unfamiliar territory to work in, West had to move fast to prevent the case ending in tragedy.

INSPECTOR WEST CRIES WOLF

The thief swung the knife downward and buried it in the gentle swell of her breast. It made a sucking sound as he withdrew it from the punctured flesh. She moaned and sank to the ground.

Once again Scotland Yard was thrown into confusion by another masterful burglary. But this time Lobo's gang had revealed themselves as killers intent on letting nothing interfere with their criminal activities.

Inspector West was baffled.

The only clue lay in the mark of a wolf's head branded on to the hand of each member of the gang. There had to be a connection somewhere, but it would take a very cunning trap to catch a savage wolf.

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